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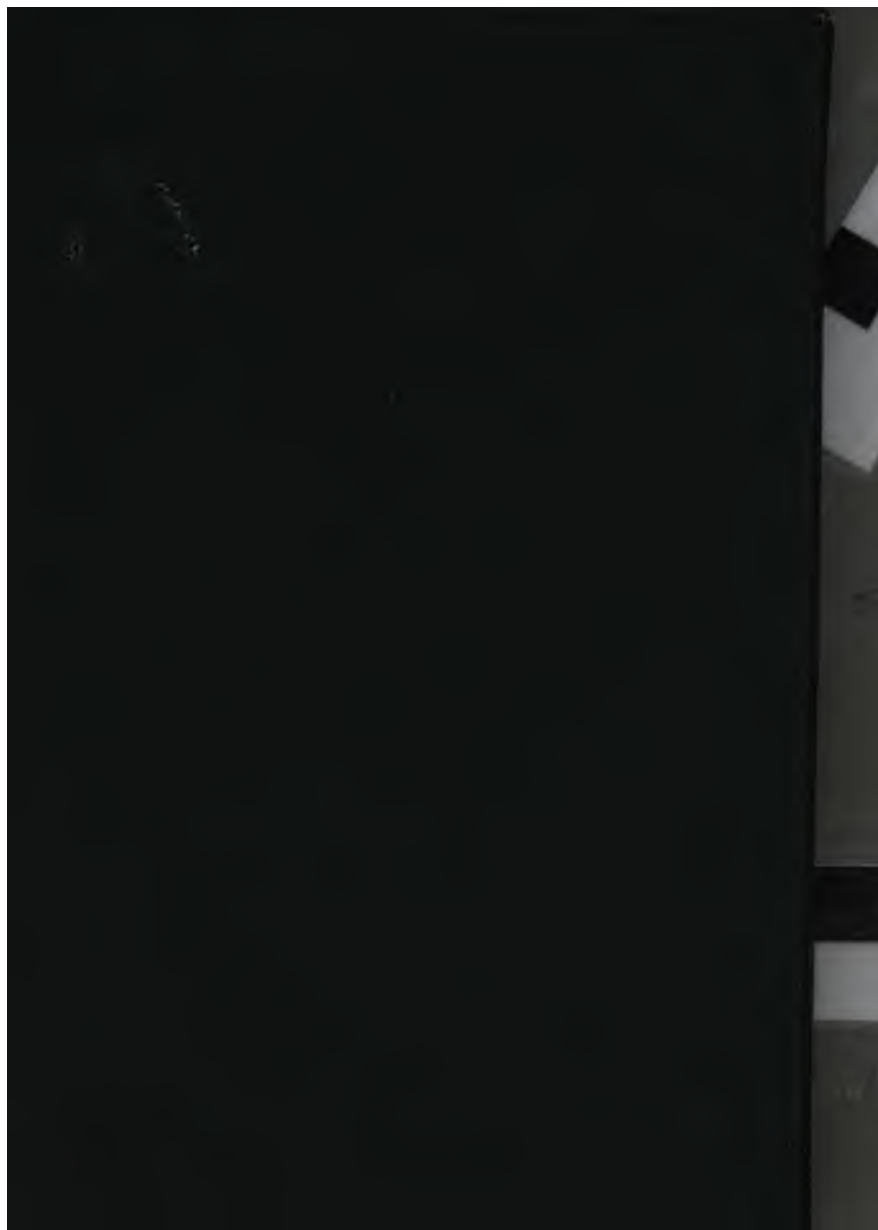
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THE FRUIT OF THE TREE.

BY

EDITH WHARTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I

1

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH . . . 2 vols.

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

BY

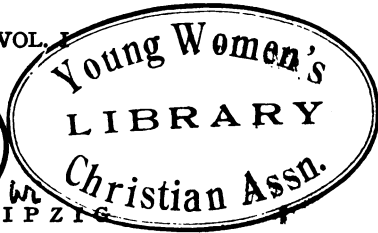
EDITH WHARTON

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF MIRTH"

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I



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THE FRUIT OF THE TREE.

BOOK I.

I.

IN the surgical ward of the Hope Hospital at Hanford, a nurse was bending over a young man whose bandaged right hand and arm lay stretched along the bed.

His head stirred uneasily, and slipping her arm behind him she effected a professional readjustment of the pillows. "Is that better?"

As she leaned over, he lifted his anxious bewildered eyes, deep-sunk under ridges of suffering. "I don't s'pose there's any kind of a show for me, is there?" he asked, pointing with his free hand—the stained seamed hand of the mechanic—to the inert bundle on the quilt.

Her only immediate answer was to wipe the dampness from his forehead; then she said: "We'll talk about that to-morrow."

"Why not now?"

"Because Dr. Disbrow can't tell till the inflammation goes down."

"Will it go down by to-morrow?"

"It will begin to, if you don't excite yourself and keep up the fever."

"Excite myself? I—there's four of 'em at home——"

"Well, then there are four reasons for keeping quiet," she rejoined.

She did not use, in speaking, the soothing inflection of her trade: she seemed to disdain to cajole or trick the sufferer. Her full young voice kept its cool note of authority, her sympathy revealing itself only in the expert touch of her hands and the constant vigilance of her dark steady eyes. This vigilance softened to pity as the patient turned his head away with a groan. His free left hand continued to travel the sheet, clasp and unclasp itself in contortions of feverish unrest. It was as though all the anguish of his mutilation found expression in that lonely hand, left without work in the world now that its mate was useless.

The nurse felt a touch on her shoulder, and rose to face the matron, a sharp-featured woman with a soft intonation.

"This is Mr. Amherst, Miss Brent. The assistant manager from the mills. He wishes to see Dillon."

John Amherst's step was singularly noiseless. The nurse, sensitive by nature and training to all physical characteristics, was struck at once by the contrast between his alert face and figure and the silent way in which he moved. She noticed, too, that the same contrast was repeated in the face itself, its spare energetic outline, with the high nose and compressed lips of the mover of men, being curiously modified by the veiled

inward gaze of the grey eyes he turned on her. It was one of the interests of Justine Brent's crowded yet lonely life to attempt a rapid mental classification of the persons she met; but the contradictions in Amherst's face baffled her, and she murmured inwardly "I don't know" as she drew aside to let him approach the bed. He stood by her in silence, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes on the injured man, who lay motionless, as if sunk in a lethargy. The matron, at the call of another nurse, had minced away down the ward, committing Amherst with a glance to Miss Brent; and the two remained alone by the bed.

After a pause, Amherst moved toward the window beyond the empty cot adjoining Dillon's. One of the white screens used to isolate dying patients had been placed against this cot, which was the last at that end of the ward, and the space beyond formed a secluded corner, where a few words could be exchanged out of reach of the eyes in the other beds.

"Is he asleep?" Amherst asked, as Miss Brent joined him.

Miss Brent glanced at him again. His voice betokened not merely education, but something different and deeper—the familiar habit of gentle speech; and his shabby clothes—carefully brushed, but ill-cut and worn along the seams—sat on him easily, and with the same difference.

"The morphine has made him drowsy," she answered. "The wounds were dressed about an hour ago, and the doctor gave him a hypodermic."

"The wounds—how many are there?"

"Besides the hand, his arm is badly torn up to the elbow."

Amherst listened with bent head and frowning brow.

"What do you think of the case?"

She hesitated. "Dr. Disbrow hasn't said——"

"And it's not your business to?" He smiled slightly. "I know hospital etiquette. But I have a particular reason for asking." He broke off and looked at her again, his veiled gaze sharpening to a glance of concentrated attention. "You're not one of the regular nurses, are you? Your dress seems to be of a different colour."

She smiled at the "seems to be," which denoted a tardy and imperfect apprehension of the difference between dark-blue linen and white.

"No: I happened to be staying at Hanaford, and hearing that they were in want of a surgical nurse, I offered my help."

Amherst nodded. "So much the better. Is there any place where I can say two words to you?"

"I could hardly leave the ward now, unless Mrs. Ogan comes back."

"I don't care to have you call Mrs. Ogan," he interposed quickly. "When do you go off duty?"

She looked at him in surprise. "If what you want to ask about is—anything connected with the management of things here—you know we're not supposed to talk of our patients outside of the hospital."

"I know. But I am going to ask you to break through the rule—in that poor fellow's behalf."

A protest wavered on her lip, but he held her eyes steadily, with a glint of good-humour behind his determination. "When do you go off duty?"

"At six."

"I'll wait at the corner of South Street and walk a little way with you. Let me put my case, and if you're not convinced you can refuse to answer."

"Very well," she said, without further hesitation; and Amherst, with a slight nod of farewell, passed through the door near which they had been standing.

II.

WHEN Justine Brent emerged from the Hope Hospital the October dusk had fallen and the wide suburban street was almost dark, except when the illuminated bulk of an electric car flashed by under the maples.

She crossed the tracks and approached the narrower thoroughfare where Amherst awaited her. He hung back a moment, and she was amused to see that he failed to identify the uniformed nurse with the girl in her trim dark dress, soberly complete in all its accessories, who advanced to him, smiling under her little veil.

"Thank you," he said as he turned and walked beside her. "Is this your way?"

"I am staying in Oak Street. But it's just as short to go by Maplewood Avenue."

"Yes; and quieter."

For a few yards they walked on in silence, their long steps falling naturally into time, though Amherst was somewhat taller than his companion.

At length he said: "I suppose you know nothing about the relation between Hope Hospital and the Westmore Mills."

"Only that the hospital was endowed by one of the Westmore family."

"Yes; an old Miss Hope, a great-aunt of Westmore's.

But there is more than that between them—all kinds of subterranean passages." He paused, and began again: "For instance, Dr. Disbrow married the sister of our manager's wife."

"Your chief at the mills?"

"Yes," he said with a slight grimace. "So you see, if Truscomb—the manager—thinks one of the mill-hands is only slightly injured, it's natural that his brother-in-law, Dr. Disbrow, should take an optimistic view of the case."

"Natural? I don't know——"

"Don't you think it's natural that a man should be influenced by his wife?"

"Not where his professional honour is concerned."

Amherst smiled. "That sounds very young—you'll excuse my saying so. Well, I won't go on to insinuate that, Truscomb being high in favour with the Westmores, and the Westmores having a lien on the hospital, Disbrow's position there is also bound up with his taking—more or less—the same view as Truscomb's."

Miss Brent had paused abruptly on the deserted pavement.

"No, don't go on—if you want me to think well of you," she flashed out.

Amherst met the thrust composedly, perceiving, as she turned to face him, that what she resented was not so much his insinuation against his superiors as his allusion to the youthfulness of her sentiments. She was, in fact, as he now noticed, still young enough to dislike being excused for her youth. In her severe uniform of blue linen, her dusky skin darkened by the

nurse's cap, and by the pale background of the hospital walls, she had seemed older, more competent and experienced; but he now saw how fresh was the pale curve of her cheek, and how smooth the brow clasped in close waves of hair.

"I began at the wrong end," he acknowledged. "But let me put Dillon's case before you dismiss me."

She softened. "It is only because of my interest in that poor fellow that I am here——"

"Because you think he needs help—and that you can help him?"

But she held back once more. "Please tell me about him first," she said, walking on.

Amherst met the request with another question. "I wonder how much you know about factory life?"

"Oh, next to nothing. Just what I've managed to pick up in these two days at the hospital."

He glanced at her small determined profile under its dark roll of hair, and said, half to himself: "That might be a good deal."

She took no notice of this, and he went on: "Well, I won't try to put the general situation before you, though Dillon's accident is really the result of it. He works in the carding-room, and on the day of the accident his 'card' stopped suddenly, and he put his hand behind him to get a tool he needed out of his trouser-pocket. He reached back a little too far, and the card behind him caught his hand in its million of diamond-pointed wires. Truscomb and the overseer of the room maintain that the accident was due to his own carelessness; but the hands say that it was caused by the fact of the cards being too near together, and that

just such an accident was bound to happen sooner or later."

Miss Brent drew an eager breath. "And what do *you* say?"

"That they're right: the carding-room is shamefully overcrowded. Dillon hasn't been in it long—he worked his way up at the mills from being a bobbin-boy—and he hadn't yet learned how cautious a man must be in there. The cards are so close to each other that even the old hands run narrow risks, and it takes the cleverest operative some time to learn that he must calculate every movement to a fraction of an inch."

"But why do they crowd the rooms in that way?"

"To get the maximum of profit out of the minimum of floor-space. It costs more to increase the floor-space than to maim an operative now and then."

"I see. Go on," she murmured.

"That's the first point; here is the second. Dr. Disbrow told Truscomb this morning that Dillon's hand would certainly be saved, and that he might get back to work in a couple of months if the company would present him with an artificial finger or two."

Miss Brent faced him with a flush of indignation. "Mr. Amherst—who gave you this version of Dr. Disbrow's report?"

"The manager himself."

"Verbally?"

"No—he showed me Disbrow's letter."

For a moment or two they walked on silently through the quiet street; then she said, in a voice still stirred with feeling: "As I told you this afternoon, Dr. Disbrow has said nothing in my hearing."

"And Mrs. Ogan?"

"Oh, Mrs. Ogan—" Her voice broke in a ripple of irony. "Mrs. Ogan 'feels it to be such a beautiful dispensation, my dear, that, owing to a death that very morning in the surgical ward, we happened to have a bed ready for the poor man within three hours of the accident.'" She had exchanged her deep throat-tones for a high reedy note which perfectly simulated the matron's lady-like inflections.

Amherst, at the change, turned on her with a boyish burst of laughter: she joined in it, and for a moment they were blent in that closest of unions, the discovery of a common fund of humour.

She was the first to grow grave. "That three hours' delay didn't help matters—how is it there is no emergency hospital at the mills?"

Amherst laughed again, but in a different key. "That's part of the larger question, which we haven't time for now." He waited a moment, and then added: "You've not yet given me your own impression of Dillon's case."

"You shall have it, if you saw that letter. Dillon will certainly lose his hand—and probably the whole arm." She spoke with a thrilling of her slight frame that transformed the dispassionate professional into a girl shaken with indignant pity.

Amherst stood still before her. "Good God! Never anything but useless lumber?"

"Never——"

"And he won't die?"

"Alas!"

"He has a consumptive wife and three children.

She ruined her health swallowing cotton-dust at the factory," Amherst continued.

"So she told me yesterday."

He turned in surprise. "You've had a talk with her?"

"I went out to Westmore last night. I was haunted by her face when she came to the hospital. She looks forty, but she told me she was only twenty-six." Miss Brent paused to steady her voice. "It's the curse of my trade that it's always tempting me to interfere in cases where I can do no possible good. The fact is, I'm not fit to be a nurse—I shall live and die a wretched sentimentalist!" she ended, with an angry dash at the tears on her veil.

Her companion walked on in silence till she had regained her composure. Then he said: "What did you think of Westmore?"

"I think it's one of the worst places I ever saw—and I am not unused to slums. It looks so dead. The slums of big cities are much more cheerful."

He made no answer, and after a moment she asked: "Does the cotton-dust always affect the lungs?"

"It's likely to, where there is the least phthisical tendency. But of course the harm could be immensely reduced by taking up the old rough floors which hold the dust, and by thorough cleanliness and ventilation."

"What does the company do in such cases? Where an operative breaks down at twenty-five?"

"The company says there was a phthisical tendency."

"And will they give nothing in return for the two lives they have taken?"

"They will probably pay for Dillon's care at the hospital, and they have taken the wife back as a scrubber."

"To clean those uncleanable floors? She's not fit for it!"

"She must work, fit for it or not; and there is less strain in scrubbing than in bending over the looms or cards. The pay is lower, of course, but she's very grateful for being taken back at all, now that he's no longer a first-class worker."

Miss Brent's face glowed with a fine wrath. "She can't possibly stand more than two or three months of it without breaking down!"

"Well, you see they've told her that in less than that time her husband will be at work again."

"And what will the company do for them when the wife is a hopeless invalid, and the husband a cripple?"

Amherst again uttered the dry laugh with which he had met her suggestion of an emergency hospital. "I know what I should do if I could get anywhere near Dillon—give him an overdose of morphine, and let the widow collect his life-insurance, and make a fresh start."

She looked at him curiously. "Should you, I wonder?"

"If I saw the suffering as you see it, and knew the circumstances as I know them, I believe I should feel justified—" He broke off. "In your work, don't you ever feel tempted to set a poor devil free?"

She mused. "One might. . . but perhaps the professional instinct to save would always come first."

"To save—what? When all the good of life is gone?"

"I daresay," she sighed, "poor Dillon would do it himself if he could—when he realises that all the good is gone."

"Yes, but he can't do it himself; and it's the irony

of such cases that his employers, after ruining his life, will do all they can to patch up the ruins."

"But that at least ought to count in their favour."

"Perhaps; if—" He paused, as though reluctant to lay himself open once more to the charge of uncharitableness; and suddenly she exclaimed, looking about her: "I didn't notice we had walked so far down Maplewood Avenue!"

They had turned a few minutes previously into the wide thoroughfare crowning the high ground which is covered by the residential quarter of Hanaford. Here the spacious houses, withdrawn behind shrubberies and lawns, revealed in their silhouettes every form of architectural experiment, from the symmetrical pre-Revolutionary structure, with its classic portico and clipped box-borders, to the latest outbreak in boulders and Moorish tiles.

Amherst followed his companion's glance with surprise. "We *have* gone a block or two out of our way. I always forget where I am when I'm talking about anything that interests me."

Miss Brent looked at her watch. "My friends don't dine till seven, and I can get home in time by taking a Grove Street car," she said.

"If you don't mind walking a little farther you can take a Liberty Street car instead. They run oftener, and you will get home just as soon."

She made a gesture of assent, and as they walked on he continued: "I haven't yet explained why I am so anxious to get an unbiassed opinion of Dillon's case."

She looked at him in surprise. "What you've told

me about Dr. Disbrow and your manager is surely enough."

"Well, hardly, considering that I am Truscomb's subordinate. I shouldn't have committed a breach of professional etiquette, or asked you to do so, if I hadn't a hope of bettering things; but I have, and that is why I've held on at Westmore for the last few months, instead of getting out of it altogether."

"I'm glad of that," she said quickly.

"The owner of the mills—young Richard Westmore—died last winter," he went on, "and my hope—it's no more—is that the new broom may sweep a little cleaner."

"Who is the new broom?"

"Westmore left everything to his widow, and she is coming here to-morrow to look into the management of the mills."

"Coming? She doesn't live here, then?"

"At Hanaford? Heaven forbid! It's an anomaly nowadays for the employer to live near the employed. The Westmores have always lived in New York—and I believe they have a big place on Long Island."

"Well, at any rate she *is* coming, and that ought to be a good sign. Did she never show any interest in the mills during her husband's life?"

"Not as far as I know. I've been at Westmore three years, and she's not been seen there in my time. She is very young, and Westmore himself didn't care. It was a case of inherited money. He drew the dividends, and Truscomb did the rest."

Miss Brent reflected. "I don't know much about the constitution of companies—but I suppose Mrs.

Westmore doesn't unite all the offices in her own person. Is there no one to stand between Truscomb and the operatives?"

"Oh, the company, on paper, shows the usual official hierarchy. Richard Westmore, of course, was president, and since his death the former treasurer—Halford Gaines—has replaced him, and his son, Westmore Gaines, has been appointed treasurer. You can see by the names that it's all in the family. Halford Gaines married a Miss Westmore, and represents the clan at Hanaford—leads society, and keeps up the social credit of the name. As treasurer, Mr. Halford Gaines kept strictly to his special business, and always refused to interfere between Truscomb and the operatives. As president he will probably follow the same policy, the more so as it fits in with his inherited respect for the *status quo*, and his blissful ignorance of economics."

"And the new treasurer—young Gaines? Is there no hope of his breaking away from the family tradition?"

"Westy Gaines has a better head than his father; but he hates Hanaford and the mills, and his chief object in life is to be taken for a New Yorker. So far he hasn't been here much, except for the quarterly meetings, and his routine work is done by another cousin—you perceive that Westmore is a nest of nepotism."

Miss Brent's work among the poor had developed her interest in social problems, and she followed these details attentively.

"Well, the outlook is not encouraging, but perhaps Mrs. Westmore's coming will make a change. I suppose she has more power than anyone."

"She might have, if she chose to exert it, for her

husband was really the whole company. The official cousins hold only a few shares apiece."

"Perhaps, then, her visit will open her eyes. Who knows but poor Dillon's case may help others—prove a beautiful dispensation, as Mrs. Ogan would say?"

"It does come terribly pat as an illustration of some of the abuses I want to have remedied. The difficulty will be to get the lady's ear. That's her house we're coming to, by the way."

An electric street-lamp irradiated the leafless trees and stone gate-posts of the building before them. Though gardens extended behind it, the house stood so near the pavement that only two short flights of steps intervened between the gate-posts and the portico. Light shone from every window of the pompous rusticated façade—in the turreted "Tuscan villa" style of the 'fifties—and as Miss Brent and Amherst approached, their advance was checked by a group of persons who were just descending from two carriages at the door.

The lamp-light showed every detail of dress and countenance in the party, which consisted of two men, one slightly lame, with a long white moustache and a distinguished nose, the other short, lean and professional, and of two ladies and their laden attendants.

"Why, that must be her party arriving!" Miss Brent exclaimed; and as she spoke the younger of the two ladies, turning back to her maid, exposed to the glare of the electric light a fair pale face shadowed by the projection of her widow's veil.

"Is that Mrs. Westmore?" Miss Brent whispered; and as Amherst muttered: "I suppose so; I've never seen her——" she continued excitedly: "She looks so

like—do you know what her name was before she married?”

He drew his brows together in a hopeless effort of remembrance. “I don’t know—I must have heard—but I never can recall people’s names.”

“That’s bad, for a leader of men!” she said mockingly, and he answered, as though touched on a sore point: “I mean people who don’t count. I never forget an operative’s name or face.”

“One can never tell who may be going to count,” she rejoined sententiously.

He dwelt on this in silence while they walked on catching as they passed a glimpse of the red-carpeted Westmore hall on which the glass doors were just being closed. At length he roused himself to ask: “Does Mrs. Westmore look like someone you know?”

“I fancied so—a girl who was at the Sacred Heart in Paris with me. But isn’t this my corner?” she exclaimed, as they turned into another street, down which a laden car was descending.

Its approach left them time for no more than a hurried hand-clasp, and when Miss Brent had been absorbed into the packed interior her companion, as his habit was, stood for awhile where she had left him, gazing at some indefinite point in space; then, waking to a sudden consciousness of his surroundings, he walked off toward the centre of the town.

At the junction of two business streets he met an empty car marked “Westmore,” and springing into it, seated himself in a corner and drew out a pocket Shakespeare. He read on, indifferent to his surroundings, till the car left the asphalt streets and illuminated shop-

fronts for a grey intermediate region of mud and macadam. Then he pocketed his volume and sat looking out into the gloom.

The houses grew less frequent, with darker gaps of night between; and the rare street-lamps shone on cracked pavements, crooked telegraph-poles, hoardings tapestried with patent-medicine posters, and all the mean desolation of an American industrial suburb. Farther on there came a weed-grown field or two, then a row of operatives' houses, the showy gables of the "Eldorado" road-house—the only building in Westmore on which fresh paint was freely lavished—then the company "store," the machine shops and other out-buildings, the vast forbidding bulk of the factories looming above the river-bend, and the sudden neatness of the manager's turf and privet hedges. The scene was so familiar to Amherst that he had lost the habit of comparison, and his absorption in the moral and material needs of the workers sometimes made him forget the outward setting of their lives. But to-night he recalled the nurse's comment—"it looks so dead"—and the phrase roused him to a fresh perception of the scene. With sudden disgust he saw the sordidness of it all—the poor monotonous houses, the trampled grass-banks, the lean dogs prowling in refuse-heaps, the reflection of a crooked gas-lamp in a stagnant loop of the river; and he asked himself how it was possible to put any sense of moral beauty into lives bounded forever by the low horizon of the factory. There is a fortuitous ugliness that has life and hope in it: the ugliness of overcrowded city streets, of the rush and drive of packed activities; but this outspread meanness of the suburban working

colony, uncircumscribed by any pressure of surrounding life, and sunk into blank acceptance of its isolation, its banishment from beauty and variety and surprise, seemed to Amherst the very negation of hope and life.

"She's right," he mused—"it's dead—stone dead: there isn't a drop of wholesome blood left in it."

The Moosuc River valley, in the hollow of which, for that river's sake, the Westmore mills had been planted, lingered in the memory of pre-industrial Hanaford as the pleasantest suburb of the town. Here, beyond a region of orchards and farm-houses, several "leading citizens" had placed, above the river-bank, their prim wood-cut "residences," with porticoes and terraced lawns; and from the chief of these, Hopewood, brought into the Westmore family by the Miss Hope who had married an earlier Westmore, the grim mill-village had been carved. The pillared "residences" had, after this, inevitably fallen to base uses; but the old house at Hopewood, in its wooded grounds, remained, neglected but intact, beyond the first bend of the river, deserted as a dwelling but "held" in anticipation of rising values, when the inevitable growth of Westmore should increase the demand for small building lots. Whenever Amherst's eyes were refreshed by the hanging foliage above the roofs of Westmore, he longed to convert the abandoned country-seat into a park and playground for the mill-hands; but he knew that the company counted on the gradual sale of Hopewood as a source of profit. No—the mill-town would not grow beautiful as it grew larger—rather, in obedience to the grim law of industrial prosperity, it would soon lose its one lingering grace and spread out in unmitigated ugly-

ness, devouring green fields and shaded slopes like some insect-plague consuming the land. The conditions were familiar enough to Amherst; and their apparent inevitableness mocked the hopes he had based on Mrs. Westmore's arrival.

"Where every stone is piled on another, through the whole stupid structure of selfishness and egotism, how can one be pulled out without making the whole thing topple? And whatever they're blind to, they always see that," he mused, reaching up for the strap of the car.

He walked a few yards beyond the manager's house, and turned down a side street lined with scattered cottages. Approaching one of these by a gravelled path he pushed open the door, and entered a sitting-room where a green-shaded lamp shone pleasantly on bookshelves and a crowded writing-table.

A brisk little woman in black, laying down the evening paper as she rose, lifted her hands to his tall shoulders.

"Well, mother," he said, stooping to her kiss.

"You're late, John," she smiled back at him, not reproachfully, but with affection.

She was a wonderfully compact and active creature, with face so young and hair so white that she looked as unreal as a stage mother till a close view revealed the fine lines that experience had drawn about her mouth and eyes. The eyes themselves, brightly black and glancing, had none of the veiled depths of her son's gaze. Their look was outward, on a world which had dealt her hard blows and few favours, but in which her interest was still fresh, amused and unabated.

Amherst glanced at his watch. "Never mind—

Duplain will be later still. I had to go into Hanaford, and he is replacing me at the office."

"So much the better, dear: we can have a minute to ourselves. Sit down and tell me what kept you."

She picked up her knitting as she spoke, having the kind of hands that find repose in ceaseless small activities. Her son could not remember a time when he had not seen those small hands in motion—shaping garments, darning rents, repairing furniture, exploring the inner economy of clocks. "I make a sort of rag-carpet of the odd minutes," she had once explained to a friend who wondered at her turning to her needlework in the moment's interval between other tasks.

Amherst threw himself wearily into a chair. "I was trying to find out something about Dillon's case," he said.

His mother turned a quick glance toward the door, rose to close it, and reseated herself.

"Well?"

"I managed to have a talk with his nurse when she went off duty this evening."

"The nurse? I wonder you could get her to speak."

"Luckily she's not the regular incumbent, but a volunteer who happened to be here on a visit. As it was, I had some difficulty in making her talk—till I told her of Disbrow's letter."

Mrs. Amherst lifted her bright glance from the needles. "He's very bad, then?"

"Hopelessly maimed!"

She shivered and cast down her eyes. "Do you suppose she really knows?"

"She struck me as quite competent to judge."

"A volunteer, you say, here on a visit? What is her name?"

He raised his head with a vague look. "I never thought of asking her."

Mrs. Amherst laughed. "How like you! Did she say with whom she was staying?"

"I think she said in Oak Street—but she didn't mention any name."

Mrs. Amherst wrinkled her brows thoughtfully. "I wonder if she's not the thin dark girl I saw the other day with Mrs. Harry Dressel. Was she tall and rather handsome?"

"I don't know," murmured Amherst indifferently. As a rule he was humorously resigned to his mother's habit of deserting the general for the particular, and following some irrelevant thread of association in utter disregard of the main issue. But to-night, preoccupied with his subject, and incapable of conceiving how anyone else could be unaffected by it, he resented her indifference as a sign of incurable frivolity.

"How she can live close to such suffering and forget it!" was his thought; then, with a movement of self-reproach, he remembered that the work flying through her fingers was to take shape as a garment for one of the infant Dillons. "She takes her pity out in action, like that quiet nurse, who was as cool as a drum-major till she took off her uniform—and then!" His face softened at the recollection of the girl's outbreak. Much as he admired, in theory, the woman who kept a calm exterior in emergencies, he had all a man's desire to know that the springs of feeling lay close to the unruffled surface.

Mrs. Amherst had risen and crossed over to his chair. She leaned on it a moment, pushing the tossed brown hair from his forehead.

"John, have you considered what you mean to do next?"

He threw back his head to meet her gaze.

"About this Dillon case," she continued. "How are all these investigations going to help you?"

Their eyes rested on each other for a moment; then he said coldly: "You are afraid I am going to lose my place."

She flushed like a girl and murmured: "It's not the kind of place I ever wanted to see you in!"

"I know it," he returned in a gentler tone, clasping one of the hands on his chair-back. "I ought to have followed a profession, like my grandfather; but my father's blood was too strong in me. I should never have been content as anything but a working-man."

"How can you call your father a working-man? He had a genius for mechanics, and if he had lived he would have been as great in his way as any statesman or lawyer."

Amherst smiled. "Greater, to my thinking; but he gave me his hard-working hands without the genius to create with them. I wish I had inherited more from him, or less; but I must make the best of what I am, rather than try to be somebody else." He laid her hand caressingly against his cheek. "It's hard on you, mother—but you must bear with me."

"I have never complained, John; but now you've chosen your work, it's natural that I should want you to stick to it."

He rose with an impatient gesture. "Never fear; I could easily get another job——"

"What? If Truscomb black-listed you? Do you forget that Scotch overseer who was here when we came?"

"And whom Truscomb hounded out of the trade? I remember him," said Amherst grimly; "but I have an idea I am going to do the hounding this time."

His mother sighed, but her reply was cut short by the noisy opening of the outer door. Amherst seemed to hear the sound with relief. "There's Duplain," he said, going into the passage; but on the threshold he encountered, not the young Alsatian overseer who boarded with them, but a small boy who said breathlessly: "Mr. Truscomb wants you to come down bimeby."

"This evening? To the office?"

"No—he's sick a-bed."

The blood rushed to Amherst's face, and he had to press his lips close to check an exclamation. "Say I'll come as soon as I've had supper," he said.

The boy vanished, and Amherst turned back to the sitting-room. "Truscomb's ill—he has sent for me; and I saw Mrs. Westmore arriving to-night! Have supper, mother—we won't wait for Duplain." His face still glowed with excitement, and his eyes were dark with the concentration of his inward vision.

"Oh, John, John!" Mrs. Amherst sighed, crossing the passage to the kitchen.

III.

At the manager's door Amherst was met by Mrs. Truscomb, a large flushed woman in a soiled wrapper and diamond earrings.

"Mr. Truscomb's very sick. He ought not to see you. The doctor thinks—" she began.

Dr. Disbrow, at this point, emerged from the sitting-room. He was a pale man, with a beard of mixed grey-and-drab, and a voice of the same indeterminate quality.

"Good evening, Mr. Amherst. Truscomb is pretty poorly—on the edge of pneumonia, I'm afraid. As he seems anxious to see you I think you'd better go up for two minutes—not more, please." He paused, and went on with a smile: "You won't excite him, of course—nothing unpleasant——"

"He's worried himself sick over that wretched Dillon," Mrs. Truscomb interposed, draping her wrapper majestically about an indignant bosom.

"That's it—puts too much heart into his work. But we'll have Dillon all right before long," the physician genially declared.

Mrs. Truscomb, with a reluctant gesture, led Amherst up the handsomely carpeted stairs to the room where her husband lay, a prey to the cares of office. She ushered the young man in, and withdrew to the

next room, where he heard her coughing at intervals, as if to remind him that he was under observation.

The manager of the Westmore mills was not the type of man that Amherst's comments on his superior suggested. As he sat propped against the pillows, with a brick-red flush on his cheek-bones, he seemed at first glance to belong to the innumerable army of American business men—the sallow, undersized, lack-lustre drudges who have never lifted their heads from the ledger. Even his eye, now bright with fever, was dull and non-committal in daily life; and perhaps only the ramifications of his wrinkles could have revealed what particular ambitions had seamed his soul.

“Good evening, Amherst. I'm down with a confounded cold.”

“I'm sorry to hear it,” the young man forced himself to say.

“Can't get my breath—that's the trouble.” Truscomb paused and gasped. “I've just heard that Mrs. Westmore is here—and I want you to go round—to-morrow morning—” He had to break off once more.

“Yes, sir,” said Amherst, his heart leaping.

“Needn't see her—ask for her father, Mr. Langhope. Tell him what the doctor says—I'll be on my legs in a day or two—ask 'em to wait till I can take 'em over the mills.”

He shot one of his fugitive glances at his assistant, and held up a bony hand. “Wait a minute. On your way there, stop and notify Mr. Gaines. He was to meet them here. You understand?”

“Yes, sir,” said Amherst; and at that moment Mrs. Truscomb appeared on the threshold.

"I must ask you to come now, Mr. Amherst," she began haughtily; but a glance from her husband reduced her to a heaving pink nonentity.

"Hold on, Amherst. I hear you've been in to Hanaford. Did you go to the hospital?"

"Ezra—" his wife murmured: he looked through her.

"Yes," said Amherst.

Truscomb's face seemed to grow smaller and dryer. He transferred his look from his wife to his assistant.

"All right. You'll just bear in mind that it's Disbrow's business to report Dillon's case to Mrs. Westmore? You're to confine yourself to my message. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly clear. Good night," Amherst answered, as he turned to follow Mrs. Truscomb.

That same evening, four persons were seated under the bronze chandelier in the red satin drawing-room of the Westmore mansion. One of the four, the young lady in widow's weeds whose face had arrested Miss Brent's attention that afternoon, rose from a massively upholstered sofa and drifted over to the fireplace near which her father sat.

"Didn't I tell you it was awful, father?" she sighed, leaning despondently against the high carved mantelpiece surmounted by a bronze clock in the form of an obelisk.

Mr. Langhope, who sat smoking, with one faultlessly-clad leg crossed on the other, and his ebony stick reposing against the arm of his chair, raised his clear ironical eyes to her face.

"As an archæologist," he said, with a comprehensive

wave of his hand, "I find it positively interesting. I should really like to come here and dig."

There were no lamps in the room, and the numerous gas-jets of the chandelier shed their lights impartially on ponderously framed canvases of the Bay of Naples and the Hudson in Autumn, on Carrara busts and bronze Indians on velvet pedestals.

"All this," murmured Mr. Langhope, "is getting to be as rare as the giant sequoias. In another fifty years we shall have collectors fighting for that Bay of Naples."

Bessy Westmore turned from him impatiently. When she felt deeply on any subject her father's flippancy annoyed her.

"*You* can see, Maria," she said, seating herself beside the other lady of the party, "why I couldn't possibly live here."

Mrs. Eustace Ansell, immediately after dinner, had bent her slender back above the velvet-covered writing-table, where an inkstand of Vienna ormolu offered its empty cup to her pen. Being habitually charged with a voluminous correspondence, she had foreseen this contingency and met it by despatching her maid for her own writing-case, which was now outspread before her in all its complex neatness; but at Bessy's appeal she wiped her pen, and turned a sympathetic gaze on her companion.

Mrs. Ansell's face drew all its charm from its adaptability. It was a different face to each speaker: now kindling with irony, now gently maternal, now charged with abstract meditation—and few paused to reflect that, in each case, it was merely the mirror held up to someone else's view of life.

"It needs doing over," she admitted, following the widow's melancholy glance about the room. "But you are a spoilt child to complain. Think of having a house of your own to come to, instead of having to put up at the Hanaford hotel!"

Mrs. Westmore's attention was arrested by the first part of the reply.

"Doing over? Why in the world should I do it over? No one could expect me to come here *now*—could they, Mr. Tredegar?" she exclaimed, transferring her appeal to the fourth member of the party.

Mr. Tredegar, the family lawyer, who had deemed it his duty to accompany the widow on her visit of inspection, was strolling up and down the room with short pompous steps, a cigar between his lips, and his arms behind him. He cocked his sparrow-like head, scanned the offending apartment, and terminated his survey by resting his eyes on Mrs. Westmore's charming petulant face.

"It all depends," he replied axiomatically, "how large an income you require."

Mr. Tredegar uttered this remark with the air of one who pronounces on an important point in law: his lightest observation seemed a decision handed down from the bench to which he had never ascended. He restored the cigar to his lips, and sought approval in Mrs. Ansell's expressive eye.

"Ah, that's it, Bessy. You've that to remember," the older lady murmured, as if struck by the profundity of the remark.

Mrs. Westmore made an impatient gesture. "We've always had money enough—Dick was perfectly satis-

fied." Her voice trembled a little on her husband's name. "And you don't know what the place is like by daylight—and the people who come to call!"

"Of course you needn't see anyone now, dear," Mrs. Ansell reminded her, "except the Halford Gaineses."

"I am sure they're bad enough. Juliana Gaines will say: 'My dear, is that the way widows' veils are worn in New York this autumn?' and Halford will insist on our going to one of those awful family dinners, all Madeira and terrapin."

"It's too early for terrapin," Mrs. Ansell smiled consolingly; but Bessy had reverted to her argument. "Besides, what difference would my coming here make? I shall never understand anything about business," she declared.

Mr. Tredegar pondered, and once more removed his cigar. "The necessity has never arisen. But now that you find yourself in almost sole control of a large property——"

Mr. Langhope laughed gently. "Apply yourself, Bessy. Bring your masterly intellect to bear on the industrial problem."

Mrs. Ansell restored the innumerable implements to her writing-case, and laid her arm with a caressing gesture on Mrs. Westmore's shoulder. "Don't tease her. She's tired, and she misses the baby."

"I shall get a telegram to-morrow morning," exclaimed the young mother, brightening.

"Of course you will. 'Cicely has just eaten two boiled eggs and a bowl of porridge, and is bearing up wonderfully.'"

She drew Mrs. Westmore persuasively to her feet,

but the widow refused to relinquish her hold on her grievance.

"You all think I'm extravagant and careless about money," she broke out, addressing the room in general from the shelter of Mrs. Ansell's embrace; "but I know one thing: If I had my way I should begin to economise by selling this horrible house, instead of leaving it shut up from one year's end to another."

Her father looked up: proposals of retrenchment always struck him as business-like when they did not affect his own expenditure. "What do you think of that, eh, Tredegar?"

The eminent lawyer drew in his thin lips. "From the point of view of policy, I think unfavourably of it," he pronounced.

Bessy's face clouded, and Mrs. Ansell argued gently: "Really, it's too late to look so far into the future. Remember, my dear, that we are due at the mills to-morrow at ten."

The reminder that she must rise early had the effect of hastening Mrs. Westmore's withdrawal, and the two ladies, after an exchange of good nights, left the men to their cigars.

Mr. Langhope was the first to speak.

"Bessy's as hopelessly vague about business as I am, Tredegar. Why the deuce Westmore left her everything outright—but he was only a heedless boy himself."

"Yes. The way he allowed things to go, it's a wonder there was anything to leave. This Truscomb must be an able fellow."

"Devoted to Dick's interests, I've always understood."

"He makes the mills pay well, at any rate, and that's not so easy nowadays. But on general principles it's as well he should see that we mean to look into everything thoroughly. Of course Halford Gaines will never be more than a good figure-head, but Truscomb must be made to understand that Mrs. Westmore intends to interest herself personally in the business."

"Oh, by all means—of course—" Mr. Langhope assented, his light smile stiffening into a yawn at the mere suggestion.

He rose with an effort, supporting himself on his stick. "I think I'll turn in myself. There's not a readable book in that God-forsaken library, and I believe Maria Ansell has gone off with my volume of *Loti*."

The next morning, when Amherst presented himself at the Westmore door, he had decided to follow his chief's instructions to the letter, and ask for Mr. Langhope only. The decision had cost him a struggle, for his heart was big with its purpose; but though he knew that he must soon place himself in open opposition to Truscomb, he recognised the prudence of deferring the declaration of war as long as possible.

On his round of the mills, that morning, he had paused in the room where Mrs. Dillon knelt beside her mop and pail, and had found her, to his surprise, comparatively reassured and cheerful. Dr. Disbrow, she told him, had been in the previous evening, and had told her to take heart about Jim, and left her enough

money to get along for a week—and a wonderful new cough-mixture that he'd put up for her special. Amherst found it difficult to listen calmly, with the nurse's words still in his ears, and the sight before him of Mrs. Dillon's lean shoulder-blades travelling painfully up and down with the sweep of the mop.

"I don't suppose that cost Truscomb ten dollars," he said to himself, as the lift lowered him to the factory door; but another voice argued that he had no right to accuse Disbrow of acting as his brother-in-law's agent, when the gift to Mrs. Dillon might have been prompted by his own kindness of heart.

"And what prompted the lie about her husband? Well, perhaps he's an incurable optimist," he summed up, springing into the Hanaford car.

By the time he reached Mrs. Westmore's door his wrath had subsided, and he felt that he had himself well in hand. He had taken unusual pains with his appearance that morning—or rather his mother, learning of the errand on which Truscomb had sent him, had laid out his carefully-brushed Sunday clothes, and adjusted his tie with skilful fingers. "You'd really be handsome, Johnny, if you were only a little vainer," she said, pushing him away to survey the result; and when he stared at her, repeating: "I never heard that vanity made a man better-looking," she responded gaily: "Oh, up to a certain point, because it teaches him how to use what he's got. So remember," she charged him, as he smiled and took up his hat, "that you're going to see a pretty young woman, and that you're not a hundred years old yourself."

"I'll try to," he answered, humouring her, "but as

I've been forbidden to ask for her, I am afraid your efforts will be wasted."

The servant to whom he gave his message showed him into the library, with a request that he should wait; and there, to his surprise, he found, not the white-moustached gentleman whom he had guessed the night before to be Mr. Langhope, but a young lady in deep black, who turned on him a look of not unfriendly inquiry.

It was not Bessy's habit to anticipate the clock; but her distaste for her surroundings, and the impatience to have done with the tedious duties awaiting her, had sent her downstairs before the rest of the party. Her life had been so free from tiresome obligations that she had but a small stock of patience to meet them with; and already, after a night at Hanaford, she was pining to get back to the comforts of her own country-house, the soft rut of her daily habits, the funny chatter of her little girl, the long stride of her Irish hunter across the Hempstead plains—to everything, in short, that made it conceivably worth while to get up in the morning.

The servant who ushered in Amherst, thinking the room empty, had not mentioned his name; and for a moment he and his hostess examined each other in silence, Bessy puzzled at the unannounced appearance of a good-looking young man who might have been someone she had met and forgotten, while Amherst felt his self-possession slipping away into the depths of a pair of eyes so dark-lashed and deeply blue that his only thought was one of wonder at his previous indifference to women's eyes.

"Mrs. Westmore?" he asked, restored to self-command by the perception that his longed-for opportunity was at hand; and Bessy, his voice confirming the inference she had drawn from his appearance, replied with a smile: "I am Mrs. Westmore. But if you have come to see me, I ought to tell you that in a moment I shall be obliged to go out to our mills. I have a business appointment with our manager, but if——"

She broke off, gracefully waiting for him to insert his explanation.

"I have come from the manager; I am John Amherst—your assistant manager," he added, as the mention of his name apparently conveyed no enlightenment.

Mrs. Westmore's face changed, and she let slip a murmur of surprise that would certainly have flattered Amherst's mother if she could have heard it; but it had an opposite effect on the young man, who inwardly accused himself of having tried to disguise his trade by not putting on his everyday clothes.

"How stupid of me! I took you for—I had no idea; I didn't expect Mr. Truscomb here," his employer faltered in embarrassment; then their eyes met and both smiled.

"Mr. Truscomb sent me to tell you that he is ill, and will not be able to show you the mills to-day. I didn't mean to ask for you—I was told to give the message to Mr. Langhope," Amherst scrupulously explained, trying to repress the sudden note of joy in his voice.

He was subject to the unobservant man's acute flashes of vision, and Mrs. Westmore's beauty was like a blinding light abruptly turned on eyes subdued to obscurity. As he spoke, his glance passed from her

face to her hair, and remained caught in its meshes. He had never seen such hair—it did not seem to grow in the usual orderly way, but bubbled up all over her head in independent clusters of brightness, breaking, about the brow, the temples, the nape, into little irrelevant waves and eddies of light, with dusky hollows of softness where the hand might plunge. It takes but the throb of a nerve to carry such a complex impression from the eye to the mind, but the object of the throb had perhaps felt the electric flash of its passage for her colour rose while Amherst spoke.

“Ah, here is my father now,” she said with a vague accent of relief, as Mr. Langhope’s stick was heard tapping its way across the hall.

When he entered, accompanied by Mrs. Ansell, his sharp glance of surprise at her visitor told her that he was as much misled as herself, and gave her a sense of being agreeably justified in her blunder. “If *father* thinks you’re a gentleman——” her shining eyes seemed to say, as she explained: “This is Mr. Amherst, father: Mr. Truscomb has sent him.”

“Mr. Amherst?” Langhope, with extended hand, echoed affably but vaguely; and it became clear that neither Mrs. Westmore nor her father had ever before heard the name of their assistant manager.

The discovery stung Amherst to a somewhat unreasoning resentment; and while he was trying to subordinate this sentiment to the larger feelings with which he had entered the house, Mrs. Ansell, turning her eyes on him, said gently: “Your name is unusual. I had a friend named Lucy Warne who married a very clever man—a mechanical genius——”

Amherst's face cleared. "My father *was* a genius; and my mother is Lucy Warne," he said, won by the soft look and the persuasive voice.

"What a delightful coincidence! We were girls together at Albany. You must remember Judge Warne?" she said, turning to Mr. Langhope, who, twirling his white moustache, murmured, a shade less cordially: "Of course—of course—delightful—most interesting."

Amherst did not notice the difference. His perceptions were already enveloped in the caress that emanated from Mrs. Ansell's voice and smile; and he only asked himself vaguely if it were possible that this graceful woman, with her sunny autumnal air, could really be his mother's contemporary. But the question brought an instant reaction of bitterness.

"Poverty is the only thing that makes people old nowadays," he reflected, painfully conscious of his own share in the hardships his mother had endured; and when Mrs. Ansell went on; "I must go and see her—you must let me take her by surprise," he said stiffly: "We live out at the mills, a long way from here."

"Oh, we're going there this morning," she rejoined, unrebuffed by what she probably took for a mere social awkwardness, while Mrs. Westmore interposed: "But, Maria, Mr. Truscomb is ill, and has sent Mr. Amherst to say that we are not to come."

"Yes; so Gaines has just telephoned. It's most unfortunate," Mr. Langhope grumbled. He too was already beginning to chafe at the uncongenial exile of Hanaford, and he shared his daughter's desire to despatch the tiresome business before them.

Mr. Tredegar had meanwhile appeared, and when

Amherst had been named to him, and had received his Olympian nod, Bessy anxiously imparted her difficulty.

"But how ill is Mr. Truscomb? Do you think he can take us over the mills to-morrow?" she appealed to Amherst.

"I'm afraid not; I am sure he can't. He has a touch of bronchitis."

This announcement was met by a general outcry, in which sympathy for the manager was not the predominating note. Mrs. Ansell saved the situation by breathing feelingly: "Poor man!" and after a decent echo of the phrase, and a doubtful glance at her father, Mrs. Westmore said: "If it's bronchitis he may be ill for days, and what in the world are we to do?"

"Pack up and come back later," suggested Mr. Langhope briskly; but while Bessy sighed "Oh, that dreadful journey!" Mr. Tredegar interposed with authority: "One moment, Langhope, please. Mr. Amherst, is Mrs. Westmore expected at the mills?"

"Yes, I believe they know she is coming."

"Then I think, my dear, that to go back to New York without showing yourself would, under the circumstances, be—er—an error in judgment."

"Good Lord, Tredegar, you don't expect to keep us kicking our heels here for days?" her father ejaculated.

"I can certainly not afford to employ mine in that manner for even a fraction of a day," rejoined the lawyer, always acutely resentful of the suggestion that he had a disengaged moment; "but meanwhile——"

"Father," Bessy interposed, with an eagerly flushing

cheek, "don't you see that the only thing for us to do is to go over the mills now—at once—with Mr. Amherst?"

Mr. Langhope stared: he was always adventurously ready to unmake plans, but it flustered him to be called on to remake them. "Eh—what? Now—at once? But Gaines was to have gone with us, and how on earth are we to get at him? He telephoned me that, as the visit was given up, he should ride out to his farm."

"Oh, never mind—or, at least, all the better!" his daughter urged. "We can see the mills just as well without him; and we shall get on so much more quickly."

"Well—well—what do you say, Tredegar?" murmured Mr. Langhope, allured by her last argument; and Bessy, clasping her hands, summed up enthusiastically: "And I shall understand so much better without a lot of people trying to explain to me at once!"

Her sudden enthusiasm surprised no one, for even Mrs. Ansell, expert as she was in the interpreting of tones, set it down to the natural desire to have done as quickly as might be with Hanaford.

"Mrs. Westmore has left her little girl at home," she said to Amherst, with a smile intended to counteract the possible ill-effect of the impression.

But Amherst suspected no slight in his employer's eagerness to visit Westmore. His overmastering thought was one of joy as the fulness of his opportunity broke on him. To show her the mills himself—to bring her face to face with her people, unhampered by Truscomb's jealous vigilance, and Truscomb's false explanations; to see the angel of pity stir the depths of those unfathomable eyes, when they rested, perhaps for the

first time, on suffering that it was in their power smile away as easily as they had smiled away his or distrust—all this the wonderful moment had brought him, and thoughts and arguments thronged so hot his lips that he kept silence, fearing lest he should say too much.

IV.

JOHN AMHERST was no one-sided idealist. He felt keenly the growing complexity of the relation between employer and worker, the seeming hopelessness of permanently harmonising their claims, the recurring necessity of fresh compromises and adjustments. He hated rant, demagoguery, the rash formulating of emotional theories; and his contempt for bad logic and subjective judgments led him to regard with distrust the panaceas offered for the cure of economic evils. But his heart ached for the bitter throes with which the human machine moves on. He felt the menace of industrial conditions when viewed collectively, their poignancy when studied in the individual lives of the toilers among whom his lot was cast; and clearly as he saw the need of a philosophic survey of the question, he was sure that only through sympathy with its personal, human side could a solution be reached. The disappearance of the old familiar contact between master and man seemed to him one of the great wrongs of the new industrial situation. That the breach must be farther widened by the ultimate substitution of the stock-company for the individual employer—a fact obvious to any student of economic tendencies—presented to Amherst's mind one of the most painful problems in the scheme of social readjustment.

But it was characteristic of him to dwell rather on the removal of immediate difficulties than in the contemplation of those to come, and while the individual employer was still to be reckoned with, the main thing was to bring him closer to his workers. Till he entered personally into their hardships and aspirations—till he learned what they wanted and why they wanted it—Amherst believed that no mere law-making, however enlightened, could create a wholesome relation between the two.

This feeling was uppermost as he sat with Mrs. Westmore in the carriage which was carrying them to the mills. He had meant to take the trolley back to Westmore, but at a murmured word from Mr. Tredegar Bessy had offered him a seat at her side, leaving others to follow. This culmination of his hopes—the unlooked-for chance of a half-hour alone with her—left Amherst oppressed with the swiftness of the minutes. He had so much to say—so much to prepare her for—yet how begin, while he was in utter ignorance of her character and her point of view, and while her lovely nearness left him so little chance of perceiving anything except itself?

But he was not often the victim of his sensations, and presently there emerged, out of the very consciousness of her grace and her completeness, a clearer sense of the conditions which, in a measure, had gone to produce them. Her dress could not have hung in such subtle folds, her white chin have nestled in such rich depths of fur, the pearls in her ears have given back the light from such pure curves, if thin shoulders in *shapeless* gingham had not bent, day in, day out, above

the bobbins and carders, and weary ears throbbled even at night with the tumult of the looms. Amherst, however, felt no sensational resentment at the contrast. He had lived too much with ugliness and want not to believe in human nature's abiding need of their opposite. He was glad there was room for such beauty in the world, and sure that its purpose was an ameliorating one, if only it could be used as a beautiful spirit would use it.

The carriage had turned into one of the nondescript thoroughfares, half incipient street, half decaying lane, which dismally linked the mill-village to Hanaford. Bessy looked out on the ruts, the hoardings, the starved trees dangling their palsied leaves in the radiant October light; then she sighed: "What a good day for a gallop!"

Amherst felt a momentary chill, but the naturalness of the exclamation disarmed him, and the words called up thrilling memories of his own college days, when he had ridden his grandfather's horses in the famous hunting valley not a hundred miles from Hanaford.

Bessy met his smile with a glow of understanding. "You like riding too, I'm sure?"

"I used to; but I haven't been in the saddle for years. Factory managers don't keep hunters," he said laughing.

Her murmur of embarrassment showed that she took this as an apologetic allusion to his reduced condition, and in his haste to correct this impression he added: "If I regretted anything in my other life, it would certainly be a gallop on a day like this; but I chose my

wave of his hand, "I find it positively interesting. I should really like to come here and dig."

There were no lamps in the room, and the numerous gas-jets of the chandelier shed their lights impartially on ponderously framed canvases of the Bay of Naples and the Hudson in Autumn, on Carrara busts and bronze Indians on velvet pedestals.

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Mrs. Eustace Ansell, immediately after dinner, had bent her slender back above the velvet-covered writing-table, where an inkstand of Vienna ormolu offered its empty cup to her pen. Being habitually charged with a voluminous correspondence, she had foreseen this contingency and met it by despatching her maid for her own writing-case, which was now outspread before her in all its complex neatness; but at Bessy's appeal she wiped her pen, and turned a sympathetic gaze on her companion.

Mrs. Ansell's face drew all its charm from its adaptability. It was a different face to each speaker: now kindling with irony, now gently maternal, now charged with abstract meditation—and few paused to reflect that, in each case, it was merely the mirror held up to someone else's view of life.

"It needs doing over," she admitted, following the widow's melancholy glance about the room. "But you are a spoiled child to complain. Think of having a house of your own to come to, instead of having to put up at the Hanaford hotel!"

Mrs. Westmore's attention was arrested by the first part of the reply.

"Doing over? Why in the world should I do it over? No one could expect me to come here *now*—could they, Mr. Tredegar?" she exclaimed, transferring her appeal to the fourth member of the party.

Mr. Tredegar, the family lawyer, who had deemed it his duty to accompany the widow on her visit of inspection, was strolling up and down the room with short pompous steps, a cigar between his lips, and his arms behind him. He cocked his sparrow-like head, scanned the offending apartment, and terminated his survey by resting his eyes on Mrs. Westmore's charming petulant face.

"It all depends," he replied axiomatically, "how large an income you require."

Mr. Tredegar uttered this remark with the air of one who pronounces on an important point in law: his lightest observation seemed a decision handed down from the bench to which he had never ascended. He restored the cigar to his lips, and sought approval in Mrs. Ansell's expressive eye.

"Ah, that's it, Bessy. You've that to remember," the older lady murmured, as if struck by the profundity of the remark.

Mrs. Westmore made an impatient gesture. "We've always had money enough—Dick was perfectly satis-

fied." Her voice trembled a little on her husband's name. "And you don't know what the place is like by daylight—and the people who come to call!"

"Of course you needn't see anyone now, dear," Mrs. Ansell reminded her, "except the Halford Gaineses."

"I am sure they're bad enough. Juliana Gaines will say: 'My dear, is that the way widows' veils are worn in New York this autumn?' and Halford will insist on our going to one of those awful family dinners, all Madeira and terrapin."

"It's too early for terrapin," Mrs. Ansell smiled consolingly; but Bessy had reverted to her argument. "Besides, what difference would my coming here make? I shall never understand anything about business," she declared.

Mr. Tredegar pondered, and once more removed his cigar. "The necessity has never arisen. But now that you find yourself in almost sole control of a large property——"

Mr. Langhope laughed gently. "Apply yourself, Bessy. Bring your masterly intellect to bear on the industrial problem."

Mrs. Ansell restored the innumerable implements to her writing-case, and laid her arm with a caressing gesture on Mrs. Westmore's shoulder. "Don't tease her. She's tired, and she misses the baby."

"I shall get a telegram to-morrow morning," exclaimed the young mother, brightening.

"Of course you will. 'Cicely has just eaten two boiled eggs and a bowl of porridge, and is bearing up wonderfully.'"

She drew Mrs. Westmore persuasively to her feet,

but the widow refused to relinquish her hold on her grievance.

"You all think I'm extravagant and careless about money," she broke out, addressing the room in general from the shelter of Mrs. Ansell's embrace; "but I know one thing: If I had my way I should begin to economise by selling this horrible house, instead of leaving it shut up from one year's end to another."

Her father looked up: proposals of retrenchment always struck him as business-like when they did not affect his own expenditure. "What do you think of that, eh, Tredegar?"

The eminent lawyer drew in his thin lips. "From the point of view of policy, I think unfavourably of it," he pronounced.

Bessy's face clouded, and Mrs. Ansell argued gently: "Really, it's too late to look so far into the future. Remember, my dear, that we are due at the mills to-morrow at ten."

The reminder that she must rise early had the effect of hastening Mrs. Westmore's withdrawal, and the two ladies, after an exchange of good nights, left the men to their cigars.

Mr. Langhope was the first to speak.

"Bessy's as hopelessly vague about business as I am, Tredegar. Why the deuce Westmore left her everything outright—but he was only a heedless boy himself."

"Yes. The way he allowed things to go, it's a wonder there was anything to leave. This Truscomb must be an able fellow."

"Devoted to Dick's interests, I've always understood."

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"Oh, by all means—of course—" Mr. Langhope assented, his light smile stiffening into a yawn at the mere suggestion.

He rose with an effort, supporting himself on his stick. "I think I'll turn in myself. There's not a readable book in that God-forsaken library, and I believe Maria Ansell has gone off with my volume of *Loti*."

The next morning, when Amherst presented himself at the Westmore door, he had decided to follow his chief's instructions to the letter, and ask for Mr. Langhope only. The decision had cost him a struggle, for his heart was big with its purpose; but though he knew that he must soon place himself in open opposition to Truscomb, he recognised the prudence of deferring the declaration of war as long as possible.

On his round of the mills, that morning, he had paused in the room where Mrs. Dillon knelt beside her mop and pail, and had found her, to his surprise, comparatively reassured and cheerful. Dr. Disbrow, she told him, had been in the previous evening, and had told her to take heart about Jim, and left her enough

money to get along for a week—and a wonderful new cough-mixture that he'd put up for her special. Amherst found it difficult to listen calmly, with the nurse's words still in his ears, and the sight before him of Mrs. Dillon's lean shoulder-blades travelling painfully up and down with the sweep of the mop.

"I don't suppose that cost Truscomb ten dollars," he said to himself, as the lift lowered him to the factory door; but another voice argued that he had no right to accuse Disbrow of acting as his brother-in-law's agent, when the gift to Mrs. Dillon might have been prompted by his own kindness of heart.

"And what prompted the lie about her husband? Well, perhaps he's an incurable optimist," he summed up, springing into the Hanaford car.

By the time he reached Mrs. Westmore's door his wrath had subsided, and he felt that he had himself well in hand. He had taken unusual pains with his appearance that morning—or rather his mother, learning of the errand on which Truscomb had sent him, had laid out his carefully-brushed Sunday clothes, and adjusted his tie with skilful fingers. "You'd really be handsome, Johnny, if you were only a little vainer," she said, pushing him away to survey the result; and when he stared at her, repeating: "I never heard that vanity made a man better-looking," she responded gaily: "Oh, up to a certain point, because it teaches him how to use what he's got. So remember," she charged him, as he smiled and took up his hat, "that you're going to see a pretty young woman, and that you're not a hundred years old yourself."

"I'll try to," he answered, humouring her, "but as

I've been forbidden to ask for her, I am afraid your efforts will be wasted."

The servant to whom he gave his message showed him into the library, with a request that he should wait; and there, to his surprise, he found, not the white-moustached gentleman whom he had guessed the night before to be Mr. Langhope, but a young lady in deep black, who turned on him a look of not unfriendly inquiry.

It was not Bessy's habit to anticipate the clock; but her distaste for her surroundings, and the impatience to have done with the tedious duties awaiting her, had sent her downstairs before the rest of the party. Her life had been so free from tiresome obligations that she had but a small stock of patience to meet them with; and already, after a night at Hanaford, she was pining to get back to the comforts of her own country-house, the soft rut of her daily habits, the funny chatter of her little girl, the long stride of her Irish hunter across the Hempstead plains—to everything, in short, that made it conceivably worth while to get up in the morning.

The servant who ushered in Amherst, thinking the room empty, had not mentioned his name; and for a moment he and his hostess examined each other in silence, Bessy puzzled at the unannounced appearance of a good-looking young man who might have been someone she had met and forgotten, while Amherst felt his self-possession slipping away into the depths of a pair of eyes so dark-lashed and deeply blue that his only thought was one of wonder at his previous indifference to women's eyes.

"Mrs. Westmore?" he asked, restored to self-command by the perception that his longed-for opportunity was at hand; and Bessy, his voice confirming the inference she had drawn from his appearance, replied with a smile: "I am Mrs. Westmore. But if you have come to see me, I ought to tell you that in a moment I shall be obliged to go out to our mills. I have a business appointment with our manager, but if——"

She broke off, gracefully waiting for him to insert his explanation.

"I have come from the manager; I am John Amherst—your assistant manager," he added, as the mention of his name apparently conveyed no enlightenment.

Mrs. Westmore's face changed, and she let slip a murmur of surprise that would certainly have flattered Amherst's mother if she could have heard it; but it had an opposite effect on the young man, who inwardly accused himself of having tried to disguise his trade by not putting on his everyday clothes.

"How stupid of me! I took you for—I had no idea; I didn't expect Mr. Truscomb here," his employer faltered in embarrassment; then their eyes met and both smiled.

"Mr. Truscomb sent me to tell you that he is ill, and will not be able to show you the mills to-day. I didn't mean to ask for you—I was told to give the message to Mr. Langhope," Amherst scrupulously explained, trying to repress the sudden note of joy in his voice.

He was subject to the unobservant man's acute flashes of vision, and Mrs. Westmore's beauty was like a blinding light abruptly turned on eyes subdued to obscurity. As he spoke, his glance passed from her

face to her hair, and remained caught in its meshes. He had never seen such hair—it did not seem to grow in the usual orderly way, but bubbled up all over her head in independent clusters of brightness, breaking, about the brow, the temples, the nape, into little irrelevant waves and eddies of light, with dusky hollows of softness where the hand might plunge. It takes but the throb of a nerve to carry such a complex impression from the eye to the mind, but the object of the throb had perhaps felt the electric flash of its passage for her colour rose while Amherst spoke.

“Ah, here is my father now,” she said with a vague accent of relief, as Mr. Langhope’s stick was heard tapping its way across the hall.

When he entered, accompanied by Mrs. Ansell, his sharp glance of surprise at her visitor told her that he was as much misled as herself, and gave her a sense of being agreeably justified in her blunder. “If *father* thinks you’re a gentleman——” her shining eyes seemed to say, as she explained: “This is Mr. Amherst, father: Mr. Truscomb has sent him.”

“Mr. Amherst?” Langhope, with extended hand, echoed affably but vaguely; and it became clear that neither Mrs. Westmore nor her father had ever before heard the name of their assistant manager.

The discovery stung Amherst to a somewhat unreasoning resentment; and while he was trying to subordinate this sentiment to the larger feelings with which he had entered the house, Mrs. Ansell, turning her eyes on him, said gently: “Your name is unusual. I had a friend named Lucy Warne who married a very clever a mechanical genius——”

Amherst's face cleared. "My father *was* a genius; and my mother is Lucy Warne," he said, won by the soft look and the persuasive voice.

"What a delightful coincidence! We were girls together at Albany. You must remember Judge Warne?" she said, turning to Mr. Langhope, who, twirling his white moustache, murmured, a shade less cordially: "Of course—of course—delightful—most interesting."

Amherst did not notice the difference. His perceptions were already enveloped in the caress that emanated from Mrs. Ansell's voice and smile; and he only asked himself vaguely if it were possible that this graceful woman, with her sunny autumnal air, could really be his mother's contemporary. But the question brought an instant reaction of bitterness.

"Poverty is the only thing that makes people old nowadays," he reflected, painfully conscious of his own share in the hardships his mother had endured; and when Mrs. Ansell went on; "I must go and see her—you must let me take her by surprise," he said stiffly: "We live out at the mills, a long way from here."

"Oh, we're going there this morning," she rejoined, unrebuffed by what she probably took for a mere social awkwardness, while Mrs. Westmore interposed: "But, Maria, Mr. Truscomb is ill, and has sent Mr. Amherst to say that we are not to come."

"Yes: so Gaines has just telephoned. It's most unfortunate," Mr. Langhope grumbled. He too was already beginning to chafe at the uncongenial exile of Hanaford, and he shared his daughter's desire to despatch the tiresome business before them.

Mr. Tredegar had meanwhile appeared, and when

Amherst had been named to him, and had received his Olympian nod, Bessy anxiously imparted her difficulty.

"But how ill is Mr. Truscomb? Do you think he can take us over the mills to-morrow?" she appealed to Amherst.

"I'm afraid not; I am sure he can't. He has a touch of bronchitis."

This announcement was met by a general outcry, in which sympathy for the manager was not the predominating note. Mrs. Ansell saved the situation by breathing feelingly: "Poor man!" and after a decent echo of the phrase, and a doubtful glance at her father, Mrs. Westmore said: "If it's bronchitis he may be ill for days, and what in the world are we to do?"

"Pack up and come back later," suggested Mr. Langhope briskly; but while Bessy sighed "Oh, that dreadful journey!" Mr. Tredegar interposed with authority: "One moment, Langhope, please. Mr. Amherst, is Mrs. Westmore expected at the mills?"

"Yes, I believe they know she is coming."

"Then I think, my dear, that to go back to New York without showing yourself would, under the circumstances, be—er—an error in judgment."

"Good Lord, Tredegar, you don't expect to keep us kicking our heels here for days?" her father ejaculated.

"I can certainly not afford to employ mine in that manner for even a fraction of a day," rejoined the lawyer, always acutely resentful of the suggestion that he had a disengaged moment; "but meanwhile——"

"Father," Bessy interposed, with an eagerly flushing

cheek, "don't you see that the only thing for us to do is to go over the mills now—at once—with Mr. Amherst?"

Mr. Langhope stared: he was always adventurously ready to unmake plans, but it flustered him to be called on to remake them. "Eh—what? Now—at once? But Gaines was to have gone with us, and how on earth are we to get at him? He telephoned me that, as the visit was given up, he should ride out to his farm."

"Oh, never mind—or, at least, all the better!" his daughter urged. "We can see the mills just as well without him; and we shall get on so much more quickly."

"Well—well—what do you say, Tredegar?" murmured Mr. Langhope, allured by her last argument; and Bessy, clasping her hands, summed up enthusiastically: "And I shall understand so much better without a lot of people trying to explain to me at once!"

Her sudden enthusiasm surprised no one, for even Mrs. Ansell, expert as she was in the interpreting of tones, set it down to the natural desire to have done as quickly as might be with Hanaford.

"Mrs. Westmore has left her little girl at home," she said to Amherst, with a smile intended to counteract the possible ill-effect of the impression.

But Amherst suspected no slight in his employer's eagerness to visit Westmore. His overmastering thought was one of joy as the fulness of his opportunity broke on him. To show her the mills himself—to bring her face to face with her people, unhampered by Truscomb's jealous vigilance, and Truscomb's false explanations; to see the angel of pity stir the depths of those unfathomable eyes, when they rested, perhaps for the

first time, on suffering that it was in their power to smile away as easily as they had smiled away his own distrust—all this the wonderful moment had brought him, and thoughts and arguments thronged so hot on his lips that he kept silence, fearing lest he should say too much.

IV.

JOHN AMHERST was no one-sided idealist. He felt keenly the growing complexity of the relation between employer and worker, the seeming hopelessness of permanently harmonising their claims, the recurring necessity of fresh compromises and adjustments. He hated rant, demagogy, the rash formulating of emotional theories; and his contempt for bad logic and subjective judgments led him to regard with distrust the panaceas offered for the cure of economic evils. But his heart ached for the bitter throes with which the human machine moves on. He felt the menace of industrial conditions when viewed collectively, their poignancy when studied in the individual lives of the toilers among whom his lot was cast; and clearly as he saw the need of a philosophic survey of the question, he was sure that only through sympathy with its personal, human side could a solution be reached. The disappearance of the old familiar contact between master and man seemed to him one of the great wrongs of the new industrial situation. That the breach must be farther widened by the ultimate substitution of the stock-company for the individual employer—a fact obvious to any student of economic tendencies—presented to Amherst's mind one of the most painful problems in the scheme of social readjustment.

But it was characteristic of him to dwell rather on the removal of immediate difficulties than in the contemplation of those to come, and while the individual employer was still to be reckoned with, the main thing was to bring him closer to his workers. Till he entered personally into their hardships and aspirations—till he learned what they wanted and why they wanted it—Amherst believed that no mere law-making, however enlightened, could create a wholesome relation between the two.

This feeling was uppermost as he sat with Mrs. Westmore in the carriage which was carrying them to the mills. He had meant to take the trolley back to Westmore, but at a murmured word from Mr. Tredegar Bessy had offered him a seat at her side, leaving others to follow. This culmination of his hopes—the unlooked-for chance of a half-hour alone with her—left Amherst oppressed with the swiftness of the minutes. He had so much to say—so much to prepare her for—yet how begin, while he was in utter ignorance of her character and her point of view, and while her lovely nearness left him so little chance of perceiving anything except itself?

But he was not often the victim of his sensations, and presently there emerged, out of the very consciousness of her grace and her completeness, a clearer sense of the conditions which, in a measure, had gone to produce them. Her dress could not have hung in such subtle folds, her white chin have nestled in such rich depths of fur, the pearls in her ears have given back the light from such pure curves, if thin shoulders in shapeless gingham had not bent, day in, day out, above

the bobbins and carders, and weary ears throbbled even at night with the tumult of the looms. Amherst, however, felt no sensational resentment at the contrast. He had lived too much with ugliness and want not to believe in human nature's abiding need of their opposite. He was glad there was room for such beauty in the world, and sure that its purpose was an ameliorating one, if only it could be used as a beautiful spirit would use it.

The carriage had turned into one of the nondescript thoroughfares, half incipient street, half decaying lane, which dismally linked the mill-village to Hanaford. Bessy looked out on the ruts, the hoardings, the starved trees dangling their palsied leaves in the radiant October light; then she sighed: "What a good day for a gallop!"

Amherst felt a momentary chill, but the naturalness of the exclamation disarmed him, and the words called up thrilling memories of his own college days, when he had ridden his grandfather's horses in the famous hunting valley not a hundred miles from Hanaford.

Bessy met his smile with a glow of understanding. "You like riding too, I'm sure?"

"I used to; but I haven't been in the saddle for years. Factory managers don't keep hunters," he said laughing.

Her murmur of embarrassment showed that she took this as an apologetic allusion to his reduced condition, and in his haste to correct this impression he added: "If I regretted anything in my other life, it would certainly be a gallop on a day like this; but I chose my

trade deliberately, and I've never been sorry for choice."

He had hardly spoken when he felt the inappropriateness of this avowal; but her prompt response struck him, a moment later, that it was, after all, the straight way to his end.

"You find the work interesting? I'm sure it will be. You'll think me very ignorant—my husband never came here so seldom. . . I feel as if I ought to know much more about it," she explained.

At last the note for which he waited had been struck. "Won't you try to—now you're here? There's so much worth knowing," he broke out impetuously.

Mrs. Westmore coloured, but rather with surprise than displeasure. "I'm very stupid—I've no head for business—but I will try to," she said.

"It's not business that I mean; it's the personal relation—just the thing the business point of view looks out. Financially, I don't suppose your mills could be better run; but there are over seven hundred workmen working in them, and there's so much to be done, for them and their children."

He caught a faint hint of withdrawal in her tone. "I have always understood that Mr. Truscomb did everything—"

Amherst flushed; but he was beyond caring for a personal rebuff. "Do you leave it to your little girls and nurses to do everything for her?" he asked.

Her surprise seemed about to verge on annoyance when he saw the preliminary ruffling of the woman which was put to the trouble of defending her dignity. "Really, I don't see—" she began with distant politeness;

"It needs doing over," she admitted, following the widow's melancholy glance about the room. "But you are a spoiled child to complain. Think of having a house of your own to come to, instead of having to put up at the Hanaford hotel!"

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She broke off, gracefully waiting for him to insert his explanation.

"I have come from the manager; I am John Amherst—your assistant manager," he added, as the mention of his name apparently conveyed no enlightenment.

Mrs. Westmore's face changed, and she let slip a murmur of surprise that would certainly have flattered Amherst's mother if she could have heard it; but it had an opposite effect on the young man, who inwardly accused himself of having tried to disguise his trade by not putting on his everyday clothes.

"How stupid of me! I took you for—I had no idea; I didn't expect Mr. Truscomb here," his employer uttered in embarrassment; then their eyes met and both smiled.

"Mr. Truscomb sent me to tell you that he is ill, and will not be able to show you the mills to-day. I didn't mean to ask for you—I was told to give the message to Mr. Langhope," Amherst scrupulously explained, trying to repress the sudden note of joy in his voice.

He was subject to the unobservant man's acute flashes of vision, and Mrs. Westmore's beauty was like blinding light abruptly turned on eyes subdued to obscurity. As he spoke, his glance passed from her

face to her hair, and remained caught in its meshes. He had never seen such hair—it did not seem to grow in the usual orderly way, but bubbled up all over her head in independent clusters of brightness, breaking, about the brow, the temples, the nape, into little irrelevant waves and eddies of light, with dusky hollows of softness where the hand might plunge. It takes but the throb of a nerve to carry such a complex impression from the eye to the mind, but the object of the throb had perhaps felt the electric flash of its passage for her colour rose while Amherst spoke.

“Ah, here is my father now,” she said with a vague accent of relief, as Mr. Langhope’s stick was heard tapping its way across the hall.

When he entered, accompanied by Mrs. Ansell, his sharp glance of surprise at her visitor told her that he was as much misled as herself, and gave her a sense of being agreeably justified in her blunder. “If *father* thinks you’re a gentleman——” her shining eyes seemed to say, as she explained: “This is Mr. Amherst, father: Mr. Truscomb has sent him.”

“Mr. Amherst?” Langhope, with extended hand, echoed affably but vaguely; and it became clear that neither Mrs. Westmore nor her father had ever before heard the name of their assistant manager.

The discovery stung Amherst to a somewhat unreasoning resentment; and while he was trying to subordinate this sentiment to the larger feelings with which he had entered the house, Mrs. Ansell, turning her eyes on him, said gently: “Your name is unusual. I had a friend named Lucy Warne who married a very clever man—a mechanical genius——”

Amherst's face cleared. "My father *was* a genius; and my mother is Lucy Warne," he said, won by the oft look and the persuasive voice.

"What a delightful coincidence! We were girls together at Albany. You must remember Judge Warne?" he said, turning to Mr. Langhope, who, twirling his white moustache, murmured, a shade less cordially: "Of course—of course—delightful—most interesting."

Amherst did not notice the difference. His perceptions were already enveloped in the caress that emanated from Mrs. Ansell's voice and smile; and he only asked himself vaguely if it were possible that this graceful woman, with her sunny autumnal air, could really be his mother's contemporary. But the question brought an instant reaction of bitterness.

"Poverty is the only thing that makes people old nowadays," he reflected, painfully conscious of his own share in the hardships his mother had endured; and when Mrs. Ansell went on; "I must go and see her—you must let me take her by surprise," he said stiffly: "We live out at the mills, a long way from here."

"Oh, we're going there this morning," she rejoined, rebuffed by what she probably took for a mere social awkwardness, while Mrs. Westmore interposed: "But, Maria, Mr. Truscomb is ill, and has sent Mr. Amherst to say that we are not to come."

"Yes: so Gaines has just telephoned. It's most unfortunate," Mr. Langhope grumbled. He too was already beginning to chafe at the uncongenial exile of Hanaford, and he shared his daughter's desire to despatch the resome business before them.

Mr. Tredegar had meanwhile appeared, and when

Amherst had been named to him, and had received his Olympian nod, Bessy anxiously imparted her difficulty.

"But how ill is Mr. Truscomb? Do you think he can take us over the mills to-morrow?" she appealed to Amherst.

"I'm afraid not; I am sure he can't. He has a touch of bronchitis."

This announcement was met by a general outcry, in which sympathy for the manager was not the predominating note. Mrs. Ansell saved the situation by breathing feelingly: "Poor man!" and after a decent echo of the phrase, and a doubtful glance at her father, Mrs. Westmore said: "If it's bronchitis he may be ill for days, and what in the world are we to do?"

"Pack up and come back later," suggested Mr. Langhope briskly; but while Bessy sighed "Oh, that dreadful journey!" Mr. Tredegar interposed with authority: "One moment, Langhope, please. Mr. Amherst, is Mrs. Westmore expected at the mills?"

"Yes, I believe they know she is coming."

"Then I think, my dear, that to go back to New York without showing yourself would, under the circumstances, be—er—an error in judgment."

"Good Lord, Tredegar, you don't expect to keep us kicking our heels here for days?" her father ejaculated.

"I can certainly not afford to employ mine in that manner for even a fraction of a day," rejoined the lawyer, always acutely resentful of the suggestion that he had a disengaged moment; "but meanwhile——"

"Father," Bessy interposed, with an eagerly flushing

cheek, "don't you see that the only thing for us to do is to go over the mills now—at once—with Mr. Amherst?"

Mr. Langhope stared: he was always adventurously ready to unmake plans, but it flustered him to be called on to remake them. "Eh—what? Now—at once? But Gaines was to have gone with us, and how on earth are we to get at him? He telephoned me that, as the visit was given up, he should ride out to his farm."

"Oh, never mind—or, at least, all the better!" his daughter urged. "We can see the mills just as well without him; and we shall get on so much more quickly."

"Well—well—what do you say, Tredegar?" murmured Mr. Langhope, allured by her last argument; and Bessy, clasping her hands, summed up enthusiastically: "And I shall understand so much better without a lot of people trying to explain to me at once!"

Her sudden enthusiasm surprised no one, for even Mrs. Ansell, expert as she was in the interpreting of tones, set it down to the natural desire to have done as quickly as might be with Hanaford.

"Mrs. Westmore has left her little girl at home," she said to Amherst, with a smile intended to counteract the possible ill-effect of the impression.

But Amherst suspected no slight in his employer's eagerness to visit Westmore. His overmastering thought was one of joy as the fulness of his opportunity broke on him. To show her the mills himself—to bring her face to face with her people, unhampered by Truscomb's jealous vigilance, and Truscomb's false explanations; to see the angel of pity stir the depths of those unfathomable eyes, when they rested, perhaps for the

first time, on suffering that it was in their power to smile away as easily as they had smiled away his own distrust—all this the wonderful moment had brought him, and thoughts and arguments thronged so hot on his lips that he kept silence, fearing lest he should say too much.

IV.

JOHN AMHERST was no one-sided idealist. He felt keenly the growing complexity of the relation between employer and worker, the seeming hopelessness of permanently harmonising their claims, the recurring necessity of fresh compromises and adjustments. He hated rant, demagoguery, the rash formulating of emotional theories; and his contempt for bad logic and subjective judgments led him to regard with distrust the panaceas offered for the cure of economic evils. But his heart ached for the bitter throes with which the human machine moves on. He felt the menace of industrial conditions when viewed collectively, their poignancy when studied in the individual lives of the toilers among whom his lot was cast; and clearly as he saw the need of a philosophic survey of the question, he was sure that only through sympathy with its personal, human side could a solution be reached. The disappearance of the old familiar contact between master and man seemed to him one of the great wrongs of the new industrial situation. That the breach must be farther widened by the ultimate substitution of the stock-company for the individual employer—a fact obvious to any student of economic tendencies—presented to Amherst's mind one of the most painful problems in the scheme of social readjustment.

But it was characteristic of him to dwell rather on the removal of immediate difficulties than in the contemplation of those to come, and while the individual employer was still to be reckoned with, the main thing was to bring him closer to his workers. Till he entered personally into their hardships and aspirations—till he learned what they wanted and why they wanted it—Amherst believed that no mere law-making, however enlightened, could create a wholesome relation between the two.

This feeling was uppermost as he sat with Mrs. Westmore in the carriage which was carrying them to the mills. He had meant to take the trolley back to Westmore, but at a murmured word from Mr. Tredegar Bessy had offered him a seat at her side, leaving others to follow. This culmination of his hopes—the unlooked-for chance of a half-hour alone with her—left Amherst oppressed with the swiftness of the minutes. He had so much to say—so much to prepare her for—yet how begin, while he was in utter ignorance of her character and her point of view, and while her lovely nearness left him so little chance of perceiving anything except itself?

But he was not often the victim of his sensations, and presently there emerged, out of the very consciousness of her grace and her completeness, a clearer sense of the conditions which, in a measure, had gone to produce them. Her dress could not have hung in such subtle folds, her white chin have nestled in such rich depths of fur, the pearls in her ears have given back the light from such pure curves, if thin shoulders in shapeless gingham had not bent, day in, day out, above

the bobbins and carders, and weary ears throbbed even at night with the tumult of the looms. Amherst, however, felt no sensational resentment at the contrast. He had lived too much with ugliness and want not to believe in human nature's abiding need of their opposite. He was glad there was room for such beauty in the world, and sure that its purpose was an ameliorating one, if only it could be used as a beautiful spirit would use it.

The carriage had turned into one of the nondescript thoroughfares, half incipient street, half decaying lane, which dismally linked the mill-village to Hanaford. Bessy looked out on the ruts, the hoardings, the starved trees dangling their palsied leaves in the radiant October light; then she sighed: "What a good day for a gallop!"

Amherst felt a momentary chill, but the naturalness of the exclamation disarmed him, and the words called up thrilling memories of his own college days, when he had ridden his grandfather's horses in the famous hunting valley not a hundred miles from Hanaford.

Bessy met his smile with a glow of understanding. "You like riding too, I'm sure?"

"I used to; but I haven't been in the saddle for years. Factory managers don't keep hunters," he said laughing.

Her murmur of embarrassment showed that she took this as an apologetic allusion to his reduced condition, and in his haste to correct this impression he added: "If I regretted anything in my other life, it would certainly be a gallop on a day like this; but I chose my

trade deliberately, and I've never been sorry for my choice."

He had hardly spoken when he felt the inappropriateness of this avowal; but her prompt response showed him, a moment later, that it was, after all, the straightest way to his end.

"You find the work interesting? I'm sure it must be. You'll think me very ignorant—my husband and I came here so seldom. . . I feel as if I ought to know so much more about it," she explained.

At last the note for which he waited had been struck. "Won't you try to—now you're here? There's so much worth knowing," he broke out impetuously.

Mrs. Westmore coloured, but rather with surprise than displeasure. "I'm very stupid—I've no head for business—but I will try to," she said.

"It's not business that I mean; it's the personal relation—just the thing the business point of view leaves out. Financially, I don't suppose your mills could be better run; but there are over seven hundred women working in them, and there's so much to be done, just for them and their children."

He caught a faint hint of withdrawal in her tone. "I have always understood that Mr. Truscomb did everything——"

Amherst flushed; but he was beyond caring for the personal rebuff. "Do you leave it to your little girl's nurses to do everything for her?" he asked.

Her surprise seemed about to verge on annoyance: he saw the preliminary ruffling of the woman who is put to the trouble of defending her dignity. "Really, I don't see——" she began with distant politeness; then

V.

MRS. WESTMORE stayed just long enough not to break in too abruptly on the flow of her friend's reminiscences, and to impress herself on Mrs. Amherst's delighted eyes as an embodiment of tactfulness and grace—looking sympathetically about the little room, which, with its books, its casts, its photographs of memorable pictures, seemed, after all, a not incongruous setting to her charms; so that when she rose to go, saying, as her hand met Amherst's, "To-night, then, you must tell me about those poor Dillons," he had the sense of having penetrated so far into her intimacy that a new Westmore must inevitably result from their next meeting.

"Say, John—the boss is a looker," Duplain commented across the dinner-table, with the slangy grossness he sometimes affected; but Amherst left it to his mother to look a quiet rebuke, feeling himself too aloof from such contacts to resent them.

He had to rouse himself with an effort to take in the overseer's next observation. "There was another lady at the office this morning," Duplain went on, while the two men lit their cigars in the porch. "Asking after you—tried to get me to show her over the mills when I said you were busy."

"Asking after me? What did she look like?"

"Well, her face was kinder white and small, with an awful lot of black hair fitting close to it. Said she came from Hope Hospital."

Amherst looked up. "Did you show her over?" he asked with sudden interest.

Duplain laughed slangily. "What? Me? And have Truscomb get on to it and turn me down? How'd I know she wasn't a yellow reporter?"

Amherst uttered an impatient exclamation. "I wish to heaven a yellow reporter *would* go through these mills, and show them up in head-lines a yard high!"

He regretted not having seen the nurse again: he felt sure she would have been interested in the working of the mills, and quick to notice the signs of discouragement and ill-health in the workers' faces; but a moment later his regret was dispelled by the thought of his visit to Mrs. Westmore. The afternoon hours dragged slowly by in the office, where he was bound to his desk by Truscomb's continued absence; but at length the evening whistle blew, the clerks in the outer room caught their hats from the rack, Duplain presented himself with the day's report, and the two men were free to walk home.

Two hours later Amherst was mounting Mrs. Westmore's steps; and his hand was on the bell when the door opened and Dr. Disbrow came out. The physician drew back, as if surprised and slightly disconcerted; but his smile promptly effaced all signs of vexation, and he held his hand out affably.

"A fine evening, Mr. Amherst. I'm glad to say I have been able to bring Mrs. Westmore an excellent report of both patients—Mr. Truscomb, I mean, and

poor Dillon. This mild weather is all in their favour, and I hope my brother-in-law will be about in a day or two." He passed on with a nod.

Amherst was once more shown into the library where he had found Mrs. Westmore that morning; but on this occasion it was Mr. Tredegar who rose to meet him, and curtly waved him to a seat at a respectful distance from his own. Amherst at once felt a change of atmosphere, and it was easy to guess that the lowering of temperature was due to Dr. Disbrow's recent visit. The thought roused the young man's combative instincts, and caused him to say, as Mr. Tredegar continued to survey him in silence from the depths of a capacious easy-chair: "I understood from Mrs. Westmore that she wished to see me this evening."

It was the wrong note, and he knew it; but he had been unable to conceal his sense of the vague current of opposition in the air.

"Quite so: I believe she asked you to come," Mr. Tredegar assented, laying his hands together vertically, and surveying Amherst above the acute angle formed by his parched finger-tips. As he leaned back, small, dry, dictatorial, in the careless finish of his evening dress and pearl-studded shirt-front, his appearance put the finishing touch to Amherst's irritation. He felt the incongruousness of his rough clothes in this atmosphere of after-dinner ease, the mud on his walking-boots, the clinging cotton-dust which seemed to have entered into the very pores of the skin; and again his annoyance escaped in his voice.

"Perhaps I have come too early—" he began; but Mr. Tredegar interposed with glacial amenity: "No, I

believe you are exactly on time; but Mrs. Westmore is unexpectedly detained. The fact is, Mr. and Mrs. Halford Gaines are dining with her, and she has delegated to me the duty of hearing what you have to say."

Amherst hesitated. His impulse was to exclaim: "There is no duty about it!" but a moment's thought showed the folly of thus throwing up the game. With the prospect of Truscomb's being about again in a day or two, it might well be that this was his last chance of reaching Mrs. Westmore's ear; and he was bound to put his case while he could, irrespective of personal feeling. But his disappointment was too keen to be denied, and after a pause he said: "Could I not speak with Mrs. Westmore later?"

Mr. Tredegar's cool survey deepened to a frown. The young man's importunity was really out of proportion to what he signified. "Mrs. Westmore has asked me to replace her," he said, putting his previous statement more concisely.

"Then I am not to see her at all?" Amherst exclaimed; and the lawyer replied indifferently: "I am afraid not, as she leaves to-morrow."

Mr. Tredegar was in his element when refusing a favour. Not that he was by nature unkind; he was, indeed, capable of a cold beneficence; but to deny what it was in his power to accord was the readiest way of proclaiming his authority, that power of loosing and binding which made him regard himself as almost consecrated to his office.

Having sacrificed to this principle, he felt free to add as a gratuitous concession to politeness: "You are per-

haps not aware that I am Mrs. Westmore's lawyer, and one of the executors under her husband's will."

He dropped this negligently, as though conscious of the absurdity of presenting his credentials to a subordinate; but his manner no longer incensed Amherst: it merely strengthened his resolve to sink all sense of affront in the supreme effort of obtaining a hearing.

"With that stuffed canary to advise her," he reflected, "there's no hope for her unless I can assert myself now;" and the unconscious wording of his thought expressed his inward sense that Bessy Westmore stood in greater need of help than her work-people.

Still he hesitated, hardly knowing how to begin. To Mr. Tredegar he was no more than an underling, without authority to speak in his superior's absence; and the lack of an official warrant, which he could have disregarded in appealing to Mrs. Westmore, made it hard for him to find a good opening in addressing her representative. He saw, too, from Mr. Tredegar's protracted silence, that the latter counted on the effect of this embarrassment, and was resolved not to minimise it by giving him a lead; and this had the effect of increasing his caution.

He looked up and met the lawyer's eye. "Mrs. Westmore," he began, "asked me to let her know something about the condition of the people at the mills——"

Mr. Tredegar raised his hand. "Excuse me," he said. "I understood from Mrs. Westmore that it was you who asked her permission to call this evening and set forth certain grievances on the part of the operatives."

Amherst reddened. "I did ask her—yes. But I don't in any sense represent the operatives. I simply wanted to say a word for them."

Mr. Tredegar folded his hands again, and crossed one lean little leg over the other, bringing into his line of vision the glossy tip of a patent-leather pump, which he studied for a moment in silence.

"Does Mr. Truscomb know of your intention?" he then enquired.

"No, sir," Amherst answered energetically, glad that he had forced the lawyer out of his passive tactics. "I am here on my own responsibility—and in direct opposition to my own interests," he continued with a slight smile. "I know that my proceeding is quite out of order, and that I have, personally, everything to lose by it, and in a larger way probably very little to gain; but I thought Mrs. Westmore's attention ought to be called to certain conditions at the mills, and no one else seemed likely to speak of them."

"May I ask why you assume that Mr. Truscomb will not do so when he has the opportunity?"

Amherst could not repress a smile. "Because it is owing to Mr. Truscomb that they exist."

"The real object of your visit then," said Mr. Tredegar, speaking with deliberation, "is—er—an underhand attack on your manager's methods?"

Amherst's face darkened, but he kept his temper. "I see nothing especially underhand in my course——"

"Except," the other interposed ironically, "that you have waited to speak till Mr. Truscomb was not in a position to defend himself."

"I never had the chance before. It was at Mrs.

Westmore's own suggestion that I took her over the mills, and feeling as I do I should have thought it cowardly to shirk the chance of pointing out to her the conditions there."

Mr. Tredegar mused, his eyes still bent on his gently-oscillating foot. Whenever a sufficient pressure from without parted the fog of self-complacency in which he moved, he had a shrewd enough outlook on men and motives; and it may be that the vigorous ring of Amherst's answer had effected this momentary clearing of the air.

At any rate, his next words were spoken in a more accessible tone. "To what conditions do you refer?"

"To the conditions under which the mill-hands work and live—to the whole management of the mills, in fact, in relation to the people employed."

"That is a large question. Pardon my possible ignorance—" Mr. Tredegar paused to make sure that his hearer took in the full irony of this—"but surely in this state there are liability and inspection laws for the protection of the operatives?"

"There are such laws, yes—but most of them are either a dead letter, or else so easily evaded that no employer thinks of conforming to them."

"No employer? Then your specific charge against the Westmore mills is part of a general arraignment of all employers of labour?"

"By no means, sir. I only meant that, where the hands are well treated, it is due rather to the personal goodwill of the employer than to any fear of the law."

"And in what respect do you think the Westmore hands unfairly treated?"

Amherst paused to measure his words. "The question, as you say, is a large one," he rejoined. "It has its roots in the way the business is organised—in the traditional attitude of the company toward the operatives. I hoped that Mrs. Westmore might return to the mills—might visit some of the people in their houses. Seeing their way of living, it might have occurred to her to ask a reason for it—and one enquiry would have led to another. She spoke this morning of going to the hospital to see Dillon."

"She did go to the hospital: I went with her. But as Dillon was sleeping, and as the matron told us he was much better—a piece of news which, I am happy to say, Dr. Disbrow has just confirmed—she did not go up to the ward."

Amherst was silent, and Mr. Tredegar pursued: "I gather, from your bringing up Dillon's case, that for some reason you consider it typical of the defects you find in Mr. Truscomb's management. Suppose, therefore, we drop generalisations, and confine ourselves to the particular instance. What wrong, in your view, has been done the Dillons?"

He turned, as he spoke, to extract a cigar from the box at his elbow. "Let me offer you one, Mr. Amherst: we shall talk more comfortably," he suggested with distant affability; but Amherst, with a gesture of refusal, plunged into his exposition of the Dillon case. He tried to put the facts succinctly, presenting them in their bare ugliness, without emotional drapery; setting forth Dillon's good record for sobriety and skill, & dwell-

ing on the fact that his wife's ill-health was the result of perfectly remediable conditions in the work-rooms, and giving his reasons for the belief that the accident had been caused, not by Dillon's carelessness, but by the overcrowding of the carding-room. Mr. Tredegar listened attentively, though the cloud of cigar-smoke between himself and Amherst masked from the latter his possible changes of expression. When he removed his cigar, his face looked smaller than ever, as though desiccated by the fumes of the tobacco.

"Have you ever called Mr. Gaines's attention to these matters?"

"No: that would have been useless. He has always refused to discuss the condition of the mills with anyone but the manager."

"H'm—that would seem to prove that Mr. Gaines, who lives here, sees as much reason for trusting Truscomb's judgment as Mr. Westmore, who delegated his authority from a distance."

Amherst did not take this up, and after a pause Mr. Tredegar went on: "You know, of course, the answers I might make to such an indictment. As a lawyer, I might call your attention to the employé's waiver of risk, to the strong chances of contributory negligence, and so on; but happily in this case such arguments are superfluous. You are apparently not aware that Dillon's injury is much slighter than it ought to be to serve your purpose. Dr. Disbrow has just told us that he will probably get off with the loss of a finger; and I need hardly say that, whatever may have been Dillon's own share in causing the accident—and as to this, as you admit, opinions differ—Mrs. Westmore

will assume all the expenses of his nursing, besides making a liberal gift to his wife." Mr. Tredegar laid down his cigar and drew forth a silver-mounted note-case. "Here, in fact," he continued, "is a cheque which she asks you to transmit, and which, as I think you will agree, ought to silence, on your part as well as Mrs. Dillon's, any criticism of Mrs. Westmore's dealings with her operatives."

The blood rose to Amherst's forehead, and he just restrained himself from pushing back the cheque which Mr. Tredegar had laid on the table between them.

"There is no question of criticising Mrs. Westmore's dealings with her operatives—as far as I know, she has had none as yet," he rejoined, unable to control his voice as completely as his hand. "And the proof of it is the impunity with which her agents deceive her—in this case, for instance, of Dillon's injury. Dr. Disbrow, who is Mr. Truscomb's brother-in-law, and apt to be influenced by his views, assures you that the man will get off with the loss of a finger; but someone equally competent to speak told me last night that he would lose not only his hand but his arm."

Amherst's voice had swelled to a deep note of anger, and with his tossed hair, and eyes darkening under furrowed brows, he presented an image of revolutionary violence which deepened the disdain on Mr. Tredegar's lip.

"Someone equally competent to speak? Are you prepared to name this anonymous authority?"

Amherst hesitated. "No—I shall have to ask you to take my word for it," he returned with a shade of embarrassment.

"Ah—" Mr. Tredegar murmured, giving to the

expressive syllable its utmost measure of decent exultation.

Amherst quivered under the thin lash, and broke out: "It is all you have required of Dr. Disbrow—" but at this point Mr. Tredegar rose to his feet.

"My dear sir, your resorting to such arguments convinces me that nothing is to be gained by prolonging our talk. I will not even take up your insinuations against two of the most respected men in the community—such charges reflect only on those who make them."

Amherst, whose flame of anger had subsided with the sudden sense of its futility, received this in silence, and the lawyer, reassured, continued with a touch of condescension: "My only specific charge from Mrs. Westmore was to hand you this cheque; but, in spite of what has passed, I take it upon myself to add, in her behalf, that your conduct of to-day will not be allowed to weigh against your record at the mills, and that the extraordinary charges you have seen fit to bring against your superiors will—if not repeated—simply be ignored."

When, the next morning at about ten, Mrs. Eustace Ansell joined herself to the two gentlemen who still lingered over a desultory breakfast in Mrs. Westmore's dining-room, she responded to their greeting with less than her usual vivacity.

It was one of Mrs. Ansell's arts to bring to the breakfast-table just the right shade of sprightliness, a warmth subdued by discretion as the early sunlight is tempered by the lingering coolness of night. She was, in short,

as fresh, as temperate, as the hour, yet without the concomitant chill which too often marks its human atmosphere: rather her soft effulgence dissipated the morning frosts, opening pinched spirits to a promise of midday warmth. But on this occasion a mist of uncertainty hung on her smile, and veiled the glance which she turned on the contents of the heavy silver dishes successively presented to her notice. When, at the conclusion of this ceremony, the servants had withdrawn, she continued for a moment to stir her tea in silence, while her glance travelled from Mr. Tredegar, sunk in his morning mail, to Mr. Langhope, who leaned back resignedly in his chair, trying to solace himself with Hanaford Banner, till midday should bring him a sight of the metropolitan press.

"I suppose you know," she said suddenly, "that Bessy has telegraphed for Cicely, and made her arrangements to stay here another week."

Mr. Langhope's stick slipped to the floor with the sudden displacement of his whole lounging person, and Mr. Tredegar, removing his tortoise-shell reading-glasses, put them hastily into their case, as though to declare for instant departure.

"My dear Maria—" Mr. Langhope gasped, while she rose and restored his stick.

"She considers it, then, her duty to wait and see Truscomb?" the lawyer asked; and Mrs. Ansell, regaining her seat, murmured discreetly: "She puts it so—yes."

"My dear Maria—" Mr. Langhope repeated helplessly, tossing aside his paper and drawing his chair up to the table.

"But it would be perfectly easy to return: it is quite unnecessary to wait here for his recovery," Mr. Tredegar pursued, as though setting forth a fact which had not hitherto presented itself to the more limited intelligence of his hearers.

Mr. Langhope emitted a short laugh, and Mrs. Ansell answered gently: "She says she detests the long journey."

Mr. Tredegar rose and gathered up his letters with a gesture of annoyance. "In that case—if I had been notified earlier of this decision, I might have caught the morning train," he interrupted himself, glancing resentfully at his watch.

"Oh, don't leave us, Tredegar," Mr. Langhope entreated. "We'll reason with her—we'll persuade her to go back by the three-forty."

Mrs. Ansell smiled. "She telegraphed at seven. Cicely and the governess are already on their way."

"At seven? But, my dear friend, why on earth didn't you tell us?"

"I didn't know till a few minutes ago. Bessy called me in as I was coming down."

"Ah—" Mr. Langhope murmured, meeting her eyes for a fraction of a second. In the encounter, she appeared to communicate something more than she had spoken, for as he stooped to pick up his paper he said, more easily: "My dear Tredegar, if we're in a box there's no reason why we should force you into it too. Ring for Ropes, and we'll look up a train for you."

Mr. Tredegar appeared slightly ruffled at this prompt acquiescence in his threatened departure. "Of course,

if I had been notified in advance, I might have arranged to postpone my engagements another day; but in any case, it is quite out of the question that I should return in a week—and quite unnecessary," he added, snapping his lips shut as though he were closing his last port-manteau.

"Oh, quite—quite," Mr. Langhope assented. "It isn't, in fact, in the least necessary for any of us either to stay on now or to return. Truscomb could come to Long Island when he recovers, and answer any questions we may have to put; but if Bessy has sent for the child, we must of course put off going for to-day—at least I must," he added sighing, "and, though I know it's out of the question to exact such a sacrifice from you, I have a faint hope that our delightful friend here, with the altruistic spirit of her sex——"

"Oh, I shall enjoy it—my maid is unpacking," Mrs. Ansell gaily affirmed; and Mr. Tredegar, shrugging his shoulders, said curtly: "In that case I will ring for the time-table."

When he had withdrawn to consult it in the seclusion of the library, and Mrs. Ansell, affecting a sudden desire for a second cup of tea, had reseated herself to await the replenishment of the kettle, Mr. Langhope exchanged his own chair for a place at her side.

"Now what on earth does this mean?" he asked, lighting a cigarette in response to her slight nod of consent.

Mrs. Ansell's gaze lost itself in the depths of the empty tea-pot.

"A number of things—or any one of them," she said at length, extending her arm toward the tea-caddy.

“For instance—?” he rejoined, following appreciatively the movements of her long slim hands.

She raised her head and met his eyes. “For instance: it may mean—don’t resent the suggestion—that you and Mr. Tredegar were not quite well-advised in persuading her not to see Mr. Amherst yesterday evening.”

Mr. Langhope uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“But, my dear Maria—in the name of reason . . . why, after the doctor’s visit—after his coming here last night, at Truscomb’s request, to put the actual facts before her—should she have gone over the whole business again with this interfering young fellow? How, in fact, could she have done so,” he added, after vainly waiting for her reply, “without putting a sort of slight on Truscomb, who is, after all, the only person entitled to speak with authority?”

Mrs. Ansell received his outburst in silence, and the butler, reappearing with the kettle and fresh toast, gave her the chance to prolong her pause for a full minute. When the door had closed on him, she said: “Judged by reason, your arguments are unanswerable; but when it comes to a question of feeling——”

“Feeling? What kind of feeling? You don’t mean to suggest anything so preposterous as that Bessy——”

She made a gesture of smiling protest. “I confess it is to be regretted that his mother is a lady, and that he looks—you must have noticed it?—so amazingly like the portraits of the young Schiller. But I only meant that Bessy forms all her opinions emotionally; and that she must have been very strongly affected by the scene Mr. Tredegar described to us.”

"Ah," Mr. Langhope interjected, replying first to her parenthesis, "how a woman of your good sense stumbled on that idea of hunting up the mother—!" but Mrs. Ansell answered, with a slight grimace: "My dear Henry, if you could see the house they live in you'd think I had been providentially guided there!" and, reverting to the main issue, he went on fretfully: "But why, after hearing the true version of the facts, should Bessy still be influenced by that sensational scene? Even if it was not, as Tredegar suspects, cooked up expressly to take her in, she must see that the hospital doctor is, after all, as likely as anyone to know how the accident really happened, and how seriously the fellow is hurt."

"There's the point. Why should Bessy believe Dr. Disbrow rather than Mr. Amherst?"

"For the best of reasons—because Disbrow has nothing to gain by distorting the facts, whereas this young Amherst, as Tredegar pointed out, has the very obvious desire to give Truscomb a bad name and shove himself into his place."

Mrs. Ansell contemplatively turned the rings upon her fingers. "From what I saw of Amherst I'm inclined to think that, if that is his object, he is too clever to have shown his hand so soon. But if you are right, was there not all the more reason for letting Bessy see him and find out as soon as possible what he was aiming at?"

"If one could have trusted her to find out—but you credit my poor child with more penetration than I've ever seen in her."

"Perhaps you've looked for it at the wrong time—

and about the wrong things. Bessy has the penetration of the heart."

"The heart! You make mine jump when you use such expressions."

"Oh, I use this one in a general sense. But I want to help you to keep it from acquiring a more restricted significance."

"Restricted—to the young man himself?"

Mrs. Ansell's expressive face seemed to commit the question to fate. "All I ask you to consider for the present is that Bessy is quite unoccupied and excessively bored."

"Bored? Why, she has everything on earth she can want!"

"The ideal state for producing boredom—the only atmosphere in which it really thrives. And besides—to be humanly inconsistent—there's just one thing she hasn't got."

"Well?" Mr. Langhope groaned, fortifying himself with a second cigarette.

"An occupation for that rudimentary little organ, the mention of which makes you jump."

"There you go again! Good heavens, Maria, do you want to encourage her to fall in love?"

"Not with a man, just at present, but with a hobby, an interest, by all means. If she doesn't, the man will take the place of the interest—there's a vacuum to be filled, and human nature abhors a vacuum."

Mr. Langhope shrugged his shoulders. "I don't follow you. She adored her husband."

His friend's fine smile was like a magnifying glass

silently applied to the gross stupidity of his remark. "Oh, I don't say it was a great passion—but they got on perfectly," he corrected himself.

"So perfectly that you must expect her to want a little storm and stress for a change. The mere fact that you and Mr. Tredegar objected to her seeing Mr. Amherst last night has roused the spirit of opposition in her. A year ago she hadn't any spirit of opposition."

"There was nothing for her to oppose—poor Dick made her life so preposterously easy."

"My ingenuous friend! Do you still think that's any reason? The fact is, Bessy wasn't awake, she wasn't even born, then. . . . She is now, and you know the infant's first conscious joy is to smash things."

"It will be rather an expensive joy if the mills are the first thing she smashes."

"Oh, I imagine the mills are pretty substantial. I should, I own," Mrs. Ansell smiled, "not object to seeing her try her teeth on them."

"Which, in terms of practical conduct, means——"

"That I advise you not to disapprove of her staying on, or of her investigating the young man's charges. You must remember that another peculiarity of the infant mind is to tire soonest of the toy that no one tries to take away from it."

"*Que diable!* But suppose Truscomb turns rusty at this very unusual form of procedure? Perhaps you don't quite know how completely he represents the prosperity of the mills."

"All the more reason," Mrs. Ansell persisted, rising at the sound of Mr. Tredegar's approach. "For don't you perceive, my poor distracted friend, that if Trus-

comb turns rusty, as he undoubtedly will, the inevitable result will be his manager's dismissal—and that thereafter there will presumably be peace in Warsaw?"

"Ah, you divinely wicked woman!" cried Mr. Langhope, snatching at an appreciative pressure of her hand as the lawyer reappeared in the doorway.

VI.

BEFORE daylight that same morning Amherst, dressing by the gas-flame above his cheap washstand, strove to bring some order into his angry thoughts.

It humbled him to feel his purpose tossing rudderless on unruly waves of emotion, yet strive as he would he could not regain a hold on it. The events of the last twenty-four hours had been too rapid and unexpected for him to preserve his usual clear feeling of mastery; and he had, besides, to reckon with the first complete surprise of his senses. His way of life had excluded him from all contact with the subtler feminine influences, and the primitive side of the relation left his imagination untouched. He was therefore the more assailable by those refined forms of the ancient spell that lurk in delicacy of feeling interpreted by loveliness of face. By his own choice he had cut himself off from all possibility of such communion; had accepted complete abstinence for that part of his nature which might have offered a refuge from the stern prose of his daily task. But his personal indifference to his surroundings—deliberately encouraged as a defiance to the attractions of the life he had renounced—proved no defence against this appeal; rather, the meanness of his surroundings combined with his inherited refinement of taste to deepen the effect of Bessy's charm.

As he reviewed the incidents of the past hours, a reaction of self-derision came to his aid. What was this exquisite opportunity from which he had cut himself off? What, to reduce the question to a personal issue, had Mrs. Westmore said or done that, on the part of a plain woman, would have quickened his pulses by the least fraction of a second? Why, it was only the old story of the length of Cleopatra's nose! Because her eyes were a heavenly vehicle for sympathy, because her voice was pitched to thrill the tender chords, he had been deluded into thinking that she understood and responded to his appeal. And her own emotions had been wrought upon by means as cheap: it was only the obvious, theatrical side of the incident that had affected her. If Dillon's wife had been old and ugly, would she have been clasped to her employer's bosom? A more expert knowledge of the sex would have told Amherst that such ready sympathy is likely to be followed by as prompt a reaction of indifference. Luckily Mrs. Westmore's course had served as a corrective for his lack of experience; she had even, as it appeared, been at some pains to hasten the process of disillusionment. This timely discipline left him blushing at his own insincerity; for he now saw that he had risked his future not because of his zeal for the welfare of the mill-hands, but because Mrs. Westmore's look was like sunshine on his frozen senses, and because he was resolved, at any cost, to arrest her attention, to associate himself with her by the only means in his power.

Well, he deserved to fail with such an end in view; and the futility of his scheme was matched by the vanity of his purpose. In the cold light of disenchant-

ment it seemed as though he had tried to build an impregnable fortress out of nursery blocks. How could he have foreseen anything but failure for so preposterous an attempt? His breach of discipline would of course be reported at once to Mr. Gaines and Truscomb; and the manager, already jealous of his assistant's popularity with the hands, which was a tacit criticism of his own methods, would promptly seize the pretext to be rid of him. Amherst was aware that only his technical efficiency, and his knack of getting the maximum of work out of the operatives, had secured him from Truscomb's animosity. From the outset there had been small sympathy between the two; but the scarcity of competent and hard-working assistants had made Truscomb endure him for what he was worth to the mills. Now, however, his own folly had put the match to the manager's smouldering dislike, and he saw himself, in consequence, discharged and blacklisted, and perhaps roaming for months in quest of a job. He knew the efficiency of that far-reaching system of defamation whereby the employers of labour pursue and punish the subordinate who incurs their displeasure. In the case of a mere operative this secret persecution often worked complete ruin; and even to a man of Amherst's worth it opened the dispiriting prospect of a long struggle for rehabilitation.

Deep down, he suffered most at the thought that his blow for the operatives had failed; but on the surface it was the manner of his failure that exasperated him. For it seemed to prove him unfit for the very work to which he was drawn: that yearning to help the world forward that, in some natures, sets the measure to

which the personal adventure must keep step. Amherst had hitherto felt himself secured by his insight and self-control from the emotional errors besetting the way of the enthusiast; and behold, he had stumbled into the first sentimental trap in his path, and tricked his eyes with a Christmas-chromo vision of lovely woman dispensing coals and blankets! Luckily, though such wounds to his self-confidence cut deep, he could apply to them the antiseptic of an unfailing humour; and before he had finished dressing, the picture of his wide schemes of social reform contracting to a blue-eyed philanthropy of cheques and groceries, had provoked a reaction of laughter. Perhaps the laughter came too soon, and rang too loud, to be true to the core; but at any rate it healed the edges of his hurt, and gave him a sound surface of composure.

But he could not laugh away the thought of the trials to which his intemperance had probably exposed his mother; and when, at the breakfast-table, from which Duplain had already departed, she broke into praise of their visitor, it was like a burning irritant on his wound.

"What a face, John! Of course I don't often see people of that kind now—" the words, falling from her too simply to be reproachful, wrung him, for that, all the more—"but I'm sure that kind of soft loveliness is rare everywhere; like a sweet summer morning with the mist on it. The Gaines girls, now, are my idea of the modern type; very handsome, of course, but you see just *how* handsome the first minute. I like a story that keeps one wondering till the end. It was very kind of Maria Ansell," Mrs. Amherst wandered happily

on, "to come and hunt me out yesterday, and I enjoyed our quiet talk about old times. But what I liked best was seeing Mrs. Westmore—and, oh, John, if she came to live here, what a benediction to the mills!"

Amherst was silent, moved most of all by the unimpaired simplicity of heart with which his mother could take up past relations, and open her meagre life to the high visitations of grace and fashion, without a tinge of self-consciousness or apology. "I shall never be as genuine as that," he thought, remembering how he had wished to have Mrs. Westmore know that he was of her own class. How mixed our passions are, and how elastic must be the word that would cover any one of them! Amherst's, at that moment, were all stained with the deep wound to his self-love.

The discoloration he carried in his eye made the mill-village seem more than commonly cheerless and ugly as he walked over to the office after breakfast. Beyond the grim roof-line of the factories a dazzle of rays sent upward from banked white clouds the promise of another brilliant day; and he reflected that Mrs. Westmore would soon be speeding home to the joy of a gallop over the plains.

Far different was the task that awaited him—yet it gave him a pang to think that he might be performing it for the last time. In spite of Mr. Tredegar's assurances, he was certain that the report of his conduct must by this time have reached the President, and been transmitted to Truscomb; the latter was better that morning, and the next day he would doubtless call his rebellious assistant to account. Amherst, meanwhile, took up his routine with a dull heart. Even should his

offence be condoned, his occupation presented, in itself, little future to a man without money or powerful connections. Money! He had spurned the thought of it in choosing his work, yet he now saw that, without its aid, he was powerless to accomplish the object to which his personal desires had been sacrificed. His love of his craft had gradually been merged in the larger love for his fellow-workers, and in the resulting desire to lift and widen their lot. He had once fancied that this end might be attained by an internal revolution in the management of the Westmore mills; that he might succeed in creating an industrial object-lesson conspicuous enough to point the way to wiser law-making and juster relations between the classes. But the last hours' experiences had shown him how vain it was to assault single-handed the strong barrier between money and labour, and how his own dash at the breach had only thrust him farther back into the obscure ranks of the strugglers. It was, after all, only through politics that he could return successfully to the attack; and financial independence was the needful preliminary to a political career. If he had stuck to the law he might, by this time, have been nearer his goal; but then the goal might not have mattered, since it was only by living among the workers that he had learned to care for their fate. And rather than have forfeited that poignant yet mighty vision of the onward groping of the mass, rather than have missed the widening of his own nature that had come through sharing their hopes and pains, he would still have turned from the easier way, have chosen the deeper initiation rather than the readier attainment.

But this philosophic view of the situation was a mere thread of light on the farthest verge of his sky: much nearer were the clouds of immediate care, amid which his own folly, and his mother's possible suffering from it, loomed darkest; and these considerations made him resolve that, if his insubordination were overlooked, he would swallow the affront of a pardon, and continue for the present in the mechanical performance of his duties. He had just brought himself to this leaden state of acquiescence when one of the clerks in the outer office thrust his head in to say: "A lady asking for you—" and looking up, Amherst beheld Bessy Westmore.

She came in alone, with an air of high self-possession in marked contrast to her timidity and indecision of the previous day. Amherst thought she looked taller, more majestic; so readily may the upward slant of a soft chin, the firmer line of yielding brows, add a cubit to the outward woman. Her aspect was so commanding that he fancied she had come to express her disapproval of his conduct, to rebuke him for lack of respect to Mr. Tredegar; but a moment later it became clear, even to his inexperienced perceptions, that it was not to himself that her challenge was directed.

She advanced toward the seat he had moved forward, but in her absorption forgot to seat herself, and stood with her clasped hands resting on the back of the chair.

"I have come back to talk to you," she began, in her sweet voice with its occasional quick lift of appeal. "I knew that, in Mr. Truscomb's absence, it would be hard for you to leave the mills, and there are one or two

things I want you to explain before I go away—some of the things, for instance, that you spoke to Mr. Tredegar about last night.”

Amherst's feeling of constraint returned. “I'm afraid I expressed myself badly; I may have annoyed him—” he began.

She smiled this away, as though irrelevant to the main issue. “Perhaps you don't quite understand each other—but I am sure you can make it clear to me.” She sank into the chair, resting one arm on the edge of the desk behind which he had resumed his place. “That is the reason why I came alone,” she continued. “I never can understand when a lot of people are trying to tell me a thing all at once. And I don't suppose I care as much as a man would—a lawyer especially—about the forms that ought to be observed. All I want is to find out what is wrong and how to remedy it.”

Her blue eyes met Amherst's in a look that flowed like warmth about his heart. How should he have doubted that her feelings were as exquisite as her means of expressing them? The iron bands of distrust were loosened from his spirit, and he blushed for his cheap scepticism of the morning. In a woman so evidently nurtured in dependence, whose views had been formed, and her actions directed, by the most conventional influences, the mere fact of coming alone to Westmore, in open defiance of her advisers, bespoke a persistence of purpose that put his doubts to shame.

“It will make a great difference to the people here if you interest yourself in them,” he rejoined. “I tried to explain to Mr. Tredegar that I had no wish to criticise the business management of the mills—even if

there had been any excuse for my doing so—but that I was sure the condition of the operatives could be very much improved, without permanent harm to the business, by anyone who felt a personal sympathy for them; and in the end I believe such sympathy produces better work, and so benefits the employer materially.”

She listened with her gentle look of trust, as though committing to him, with the good faith of a child, her ignorance, her credulity, her little rudimentary convictions and her little tentative aspirations, relying on him not to abuse or misdirect them in the boundless supremacy of his masculine understanding.

“That is just what I want you to explain to me,” she said. “But first I should like to know more about the poor man who was hurt. I meant to see his wife yesterday, but Mr. Gaines told me she would be at work till six, and it would have been difficult to go after that. I *did* go to the hospital; but the man was sleeping—is Dillon his name?—and the matron told us he was much better. Dr. Disbrow came in the evening and said the same thing—told us it was all a false report about his having been so badly hurt, and that Mr. Truscomb was very much annoyed when he heard of your having said, before the operatives, that Dillon would lose his arm.”

Amherst smiled. “Ah—Mr. Truscomb heard that? Well, he’s right to be annoyed: I ought not to have said it when I did. But unfortunately I am not the only one to be punished. The operative who tied on the black cloth was dismissed this morning.”

Mrs. Westmore flamed up. “Dismissed for that? Oh, how unjust—how cruel!”

“You must look at both sides of the case,” said

Amherst, finding it much easier to remain temperate in the glow he had kindled than if he had had to force his own heat into frozen veins. "Of course any act of insubordination must be reprimanded—but I think a reprimand would have been enough."

It gave him an undeniable throb of pleasure to find that she was not to be checked by such arguments. "But he shall be put back—I won't have anyone discharged for such a reason! You must find him for me at once—you must tell him——"

Once more Amherst gently restrained her. "If you'll forgive my saying so, I think it is better to let him go, and take his chance of getting work elsewhere. If he were taken back he might be made to suffer. As things are organised here, the hands are very much at the mercy of the overseers, and the overseer in that room would be likely to make it uncomfortable for a hand who had so openly defied him."

With a heavy sigh she bent her puzzled brows on him. "How complicated it is! I wonder if I shall ever understand it all. *You* don't think Dillon's accident was his own fault, then?"

"Certainly not; there are too many cards in that room. I pointed out the fact to Mr. Truscomb when the new machines were set up three years ago. An operative may be ever so expert with his fingers, and yet not learn to measure his ordinary movements quite as accurately as if he were an automaton; and that is what a man must do to be safe in the carding-room."

She sighed again. "The more you tell me, the more difficult it all seems. Why is the carding-room so overcrowded?"

"To make it pay better," Amherst returned bluntly; and the colour flushed her sensitive skin.

He thought she was about to punish him for his plain-speaking; but she went on after a pause: "What you say is dreadful. Each thing seems to lead back to another—and I feel so ignorant of it all." She hesitated again, and then said, turning her bluest glance on him: "I am going to be quite frank with you, Mr. Amherst. Mr. Tredegar repeated to me what you said to him last night, and I think he was annoyed that you were unwilling to give any proof of the charges you made."

"Charges? Ah," Amherst exclaimed, with a start of recollection, "he means my refusing to say who told me that Dr. Disbrow was not telling the truth about Dillon?"

"Yes. He said that was a very grave accusation to make, and that no one should have made it without being able to give proof."

"That is quite true, theoretically. But in this case it would be easy for you or Mr. Tredegar to find out whether I was right."

"But Mr. Tredegar said you refused to say who told you."

"I was bound to, as it happened. But I am not bound to prevent your trying to get the same information."

"Ah—" she murmured understandingly; and, a sudden thought striking him, he went on, with a glance at the clock: "If you really wish to judge for yourself, why not go to the hospital now? I shall be free in five minutes, and could go with you if you wish it."

Amherst had remembered the nurse's cry of recognition when she saw Mrs. Westmore's face under the street-lamp; and it immediately occurred to him that, if the two women had really known each other, Mrs. Westmore would have no difficulty in obtaining the information she wanted; while, even if they met as strangers, the dark-eyed girl's perspicacity might still be trusted to come to their aid. It remained only to be seen how Mrs. Westmore would take his suggestion; but some instinct was already telling him that the high-handed method was the one she really preferred.

"To the hospital—now? I should like it of all things," she exclaimed, rising with what seemed an almost childish zest in the adventure. "Of course that is the best way of finding out. I ought to have insisted on seeing Dillon yesterday—but I begin to think the matron didn't want me to."

Amherst left this inference to work itself out in her mind, contenting himself, as they drove back to Hanaford, with answering her questions about Dillon's family, the ages of his children, and his wife's health. Her enquiries, he noticed, did not extend from the particular to the general: her curiosity, as yet, was too purely personal and emotional to lead to any larger consideration of the question. But this larger view might grow out of the investigation of Dillon's case; and meanwhile Amherst's own purposes were momentarily lost in the sweet confusion of feeling her near him—of seeing the exquisite grain of her skin, the way her lashes grew out of a dusky line on the edge of the white lids, the way her hair, stealing in spirals of light from brow to ear, wavered off into a fruity down on the edge of the cheek.

At the hospital they were protestingly admitted by Mrs. Ogan, though the official "visitors' hour" was not till the afternoon; and beside the sufferer's bed, Amherst saw again that sudden flowering of compassion which seemed the key to his companion's beauty: as though her lips had been formed for consolation and her hands for tender offices. It was clear enough that Dillon, still sunk in a torpor broken by feverish tossings, was making no perceptible progress toward recovery; and Mrs. Ogan was reduced to murmuring some technical explanation about the state of the wound while Bessy hung above him with reassuring murmurs as to his wife's fate, and promises that the children should be cared for.

Amherst had noticed, on entering, that a new nurse—a gaping young woman instantly lost in the study of Mrs. Westmore's toilet—had replaced the dark-eyed attendant of the day before; and supposing that the latter was temporarily off duty, he asked Mrs. Ogan if she might be seen.

The matron's face was a picture of genteel perplexity. "The other nurse? Our regular surgical nurse, Miss Golden, is ill—Miss Hibbs, here, is replacing her for the present." She indicated the gaping damsel; then, as Amherst persisted: "Ah," she wondered negligently, "do you mean the young lady you saw here yesterday? Certainly—I had forgotten: Miss Brent was merely a—er—temporary substitute. I believe she was recommended to Dr. Disbrow by one of his patients; but we found her quite unsuitable—in fact, unfitted—and the doctor discharged her this morning."

Mrs. Westmore had drawn near, and while the ma-

on delivered her explanation, with an uneasy sorting and shifting of words, a quick signal of intelligence passed between her hearers. "You see?" Amherst's eyes exclaimed; "I see—they have sent her away because she told you," Bessy's flashed back in wrath, and its answering look did not deny her inference.

"Do you know where she has gone?" Amherst enquired; but Mrs. Ogan, permitting her brows a faint lift of surprise, replied that she had no idea of Miss Brent's movements, beyond having heard that she was to leave Hanaford immediately.

In the carriage Bessy exclaimed: "It was the nurse, of course—if we could only find her! Brent—did Mrs. Ogan say her name was Brent?"

"Do you know the name?"

"Yes—at least—but it couldn't, of course, be the girl I knew——"

"Miss Brent saw you the night you arrived, and thought she recognised you. She said you and she had been at some school or convent together."

"The Sacred Heart? Then it is Justine Brent! I heard they had lost their money—I haven't seen her for years. But how strange that she should be a hospital nurse! And why is she at Hanaford, I wonder?"

"She was here only on a visit; she didn't tell me where she lived. She said she heard that a surgical nurse was wanted at the hospital, and volunteered her services; I'm afraid she got small thanks for them."

"Do you really think they sent her away for talking to you? How do you suppose they found out?"

"I waited for her last night when she left the hospital, and I suppose Mrs. Ogan or one of the doctors saw us.

It was thoughtless of me," Amherst exclaimed with compunction.

"I wish I had seen her—poor Justine! We were the greatest friends at the convent. She was the ringleader in all our mischief—I never saw anyone so quick and clever. I suppose her fun is all gone now."

For a moment Mrs. Westmore's mind continued to linger among her memories; then she reverted to the question of the Dillons, and of what might best be done for them if Miss Brent's fears should be realised.

As the carriage neared her door she turned to her companion with extended hand. "Thank you so much, Mr. Amherst. I am glad you suggested that Mr. Truscomb should find some work for Dillon about the office. But I must talk to you about this again—can you come in this evening?"

VII.

AMHERST could never afterward regain a detailed impression of the weeks that followed. They lived in his memory chiefly as exponents of the unforeseen, nothing he had looked for having come to pass in the way or at the time expected; while the whole movement of life was like the noon-day flow of a river, in which the separate ripples of brightness are all merged in one blinding glitter. His recurring conferences with Mrs. Westmore formed, as it were, the small surprising kernel of fact about which sensations gathered and grew with the swift ripening of a magician's fruit. That she should remain on at Hanaford to look into the condition of the mills did not, in itself, seem surprising to Amherst; for his short phase of doubt had been succeeded by an abundant inflow of faith in her intentions. It satisfied his inner craving for harmony that her face and spirit should, after all, so corroborate and complete each other; that it needed no moral sophistry to adjust her acts to her appearance, her words to the promise of her smile. But her immediate confidence in him, her resolve to support him in his avowed insubordination, to ignore, with the royal licence of her sex, all that was irregular and inexpedient in asking his guidance while the whole official strength of the company darkened the background with a gather-

ing storm of disapproval—this sense of being the glove flung by her hand in the face of convention, quickened astonishingly the flow of Amherst's sensations. It was as though a mountain-climber, braced to the strain of a hard ascent, should suddenly see the way break into roses, and level itself in a path for his feet.

On his second visit he found the two ladies together, and Mrs. Ansell's smile of approval seemed to cast a social sanction on the episode, to classify it as comfortably usual and unimportant. He could see that her friend's manner put Bessy at ease, helping her to ask her own questions, and to reflect on his suggestions, with less bewilderment and more self-confidence. Mrs. Ansell had the faculty of restoring to her the belief in her reasoning powers that her father could dissolve in a monosyllable.

The talk, on this occasion, had turned mainly on the future of the Dillon family, on the best means of compensating for the accident, and, incidentally, on the care of the young children of the mill-colony. Though Amherst did not believe in the extremer forms of industrial paternalism, he was yet of opinion that, where married women were employed, the employer should care for their children. He had been gradually, and somewhat reluctantly, brought to this conviction by the many instances of unavoidable neglect and suffering among the children of the women-workers at Westmore; and Mrs. Westmore took up the scheme with all the ardour of her young motherliness, quivering at the thought of hungry or ailing children while her Cicely, leaning a silken head against her, lifted puzzled eyes to her face.

On the larger problems of the case it was less easy to fix Bessy's attention; but Amherst was far from being one of the extreme theorists who reject temporary remedies lest they defer the day of general renewal, and since he looked on every gain in the material condition of the mill-hands as a step in their moral growth, he was quite willing to hold back his fundamental plans while he discussed the establishment of a nursery, and of a night-school for the boys in the mills.

The third time he called, he found Mr. Langhope and Mr. Halford Gaines of the company. The President of the Westmore mills was a trim middle-sized man, whose high pink varnish of good living would have turned to purple could he have known Mr. Langhope's opinion of his jewelled shirt-front and the padded shoulders of his evening-coat. Happily he had no inkling of these views, and was fortified in his command of the situation by an unimpaired confidence in his own appearance; while Mr. Langhope, discreetly withdrawn behind a veil of cigar-smoke, let his silence play like a fine criticism over the various phases of the discussion.

It was a surprise to Amherst to find himself in Mr. Gaines's presence. The President, secluded in his high office, seldom visited the mills, and when there showed no consciousness of any presence lower than Truscomb's; and Amherst's first thought was that, in the manager's enforced absence, he was to be called to account by the head of the firm. But he was affably welcomed by Mr. Gaines, who made it clear that his ostensible purpose in coming was to hear Amherst's views as to the proposed night-schools and nursery. These were pointedly alluded to as Mrs. Westmore's

projects, and the young man was made to feel that he was merely called in as a temporary adviser in Truscomb's absence. This was, in fact, the position Amherst preferred to take, and he scrupulously restricted himself to the answering of questions, letting Mrs. Westmore unfold his plans as though they had been her own. "It is much better," he reflected, "that they should all think so, and she too, for Truscomb will be on his legs again in a day or two, and then my hours will be numbered."

Meanwhile he was surprised to find Mr. Gaines oddly amenable to the proposed innovations, which he appeared to regard as new fashions in mill-management, to be adopted for the same cogent reasons as a new cut in coat-tails.

"Of course we want to be up-to-date—there's no reason why the Westmore mills shouldn't do as well by their people as any mills in the country," he affirmed, in the tone of the entertainer accustomed to say: "I want the thing done handsomely." But he seemed even less conscious than Mrs. Westmore that each particular wrong could be traced back to a radical vice in the system. He appeared to think that every murmur of assent to her proposals passed the sponge, once for all, over the difficulty propounded: as though a problem in algebra should be solved by wiping it off the blackboard.

"My dear Bessy, we all owe you a debt of gratitude for coming here, and bringing, so to speak, a fresh eye to bear on the subject. If I've been, perhaps, a little too exclusively absorbed in making the mills profitable, my friend Langhope will, I believe, not be the first to

—er—cast a stone at me.” Mr. Gaines, who was the soul of delicacy, stumbled a little over the awkward associations connected with this figure, but, picking himself up, hastened on to affirm: “And in that respect, I think we can challenge comparison with any industry in the state; but I am the first to admit that there may be another side, a side that it takes a woman—a mother—to see. For instance,” he threw in jocosely, “I flatter myself that I know how to order a good dinner; but I always leave the flowers to my wife. And if you’ll permit me to say so,” he went on, encouraged by the felicity of his image, “I believe it will produce a most pleasing effect—not only on the operatives themselves, but on the whole of Hanaford—on our own set of people especially—to have you come here and interest yourself in the—er—philanthropic side of the work.”

Bessy coloured a little. She blushed easily, and was perhaps not over-discriminating as to the quality of praise received; but under her ripple of pleasure a stronger feeling stirred, and she said hastily: “I am afraid I never should have thought of these things if Mr. Amherst had not pointed them out to me.”

Mr. Gaines met this blandly. “Very gratifying to Mr. Amherst to have you put it in that way; and I am sure we all appreciate his valuable hints. Truscomb himself could not have been more helpful, though his larger experience will no doubt be useful later on, in developing and—er—modifying your plans.”

It was difficult to reconcile this large view of the moral issue with the existence of abuses which made the management of the Westmore mills as unpleasantly notorious in one section of the community as it was

agreeably notable in another. But Amherst was impartial enough to see that Mr. Gaines was unconscious of the incongruities of the situation. He left the reconciling of incompatibles to Truscomb with the simple faith of the believer committing a like task to his maker: it was in the manager's mind that the dark processes of adjustment took place. Mr. Gaines cultivated the convenient and popular idea that by ignoring wrongs one is not so much condoning as actually denying their existence; and in pursuance of this belief he devoutly abstained from studying the conditions at Westmore.

A further surprise awaited Amherst when Truscomb reappeared in the office. The manager was always a man of few words; and for the first days his intercourse with his assistant was restricted to asking questions and issuing orders. Soon afterward, it became known that Dillon's arm was to be amputated, and that afternoon Truscomb was summoned to see Mrs. Westmore. When he returned he sent for Amherst; and the young man felt sure that his hour had come.

He was at dinner when the message reached him, and he knew from the tightening of his mother's lips that she too interpreted it in the same way. He was glad that Duplain's presence kept her from speaking her fears; and he thanked her inwardly for the smile with which she watched him go.

That evening, when he returned, the smile was still at its post; but it dropped away wearily as he said, with his hands on her shoulders: "Don't worry, mother; I don't know exactly what's happening, but we're not blacklisted yet."

Mrs. Amherst had immediately taken up her work, letting her nervous tension find its usual escape through her finger-tips. Her needles flagged as she lifted her eyes to his.

"Something *is* happening, then?" she murmured.

"Oh, a number of things, evidently—but though I'm in the heart of them, I can't yet make out how they are going to affect me."

His mother's glance twinkled in time with the flash of her needles. "There's always a safe place in the heart of a storm," she said shrewdly; and Amherst rejoined with a laugh: "Well, if it's Truscomb's heart, I don't know that it's particularly safe for me."

"Tell me just what he said, John," she begged, making no attempt to carry the pleasantry farther, though its possibilities still seemed to flicker about her lip; and Amherst proceeded to recount his talk with the manager.

Truscomb, it appeared, had made no allusion to Dillon; his avowed purpose in summoning his assistant had been to discuss with the latter the question of the proposed nursery and schools. Mrs. Westmore, at Amherst's suggestion, had presented these projects as her own; but the question of a site having come up, she had mentioned to Truscomb his assistant's proposal that the company should buy for the purpose the notorious Eldorado. The road-house in question had always been one of the most destructive influences in the mill-colony, and Amherst had made one or two indirect attempts to have the building converted to other uses; but the persistent opposition he encountered gave

colour to the popular report that the manager took a high toll from the landlord.

It therefore at once occurred to Amherst to suggest the purchase of the property to Mrs. Westmore; and he was not surprised to find that Truscomb's opposition to the scheme centred in the choice of the building. But even at this point the manager betrayed no open resistance; he seemed tacitly to admit Amherst's right to discuss the proposed plans, and even to be consulted concerning the choice of a site. He was ready with a dozen good reasons against the purchase of the road-house; but here also he proceeded with a discretion unexampled in his dealings with his subordinates. He acknowledged the harm done by the dance-hall, but objected that he could not conscientiously advise the company to pay the extortionate price at which it was held, and reminded Amherst that, if that particular source of offence were removed, others would inevitably spring up to replace it; marshalling the usual temporising arguments of tolerance and expediency, with no marked change from his usual tone, till, just as the interview was ending, he asked, with a sudden drop to conciliation, if the assistant manager had anything to complain of in the treatment he received.

This came as such a surprise to Amherst that before he had collected himself he found Truscomb ambiguously but unmistakably offering him—with the practised indirection of the man accustomed to cover his share in such transactions—a substantial "consideration" for dropping the matter of the road-house. It was incredible, yet it had really happened: the all-powerful Truscomb, who held Westmore in the hollow

of his hand, had stooped to bribing his assistant because he was afraid to deal with him in a more summary manner. Amherst's leap of anger at the offer was curbed by the instant perception of its cause. He had no time to search for a reason; he could only rally himself to meet the unintelligible with a composure as abysmal as Truscomb's; and his voice still rang with the wonder of the incident as he retailed it to his mother.

"Think of what it means, mother, for a young woman like Mrs. Westmore, without any experience or any habit of authority, to come here, and at the first glimpse of injustice, to be so revolted that she finds the courage and cleverness to put her little hand to the machine and reverse the engines—for it's nothing less that she's done! Oh, I know there'll be a reaction—the pendulum's sure to swing back: but you'll see it won't swing *as far*. Of course I shall go in the end—but Truscomb may go too: Jove, if I could pull him down on me, like what's-his-name and the pillars of the temple!"

He had risen and was measuring the little sitting-room with his long strides, his head flung back and his eyes dark with the inward look his mother had not always cared to see there. But now her own glance seemed to have caught a ray from his, and the knitting flowed from her hands like the thread of fate, as she sat silent, letting him exhale his hopes and his wonder, and murmuring only, when he dropped again to the chair at her side: "You won't go, Johnny—you won't go."

Mrs. Westmore lingered on for over two weeks, and

during that time Amherst was able, in various directions, to develop her interest in the mill-workers. His own schemes involved a complete readjustment of the relation between the company and the hands: the suppression of the obsolete company "store" and tenements, which had so long sapped the thrift and ambition of the workers; the transformation of the Hopewood grounds into a park and athletic field, and the division of its remaining acres into building lots for the mill-hands; the establishing of a library, a dispensary and emergency hospital, and various other centres of humanising influence; but he refrained from letting her see that his present suggestion was only a part of this larger plan, lest her growing sympathy should be checked. He had in his mother an example of the mind accessible only to concrete impressions: the mind which could die for the particular instance, yet remain serenely indifferent to its causes. To Mrs. Amherst, her son's work had been interesting simply because it *was* his work: remove his presence from Westmore, and the whole industrial problem became to her as non-existent as star-dust to the naked eye. And in Bessy Westmore he divined a nature of the same quality—divined, but no longer criticised it. Was not that concentration on the personal issue just the compensating grace of her sex? Did it not offer a warm tint of human inconsistency to eyes chilled by contemplating life in the mass? It pleased Amherst for the moment to class himself with the impersonal student of social problems, though in truth his interest in them had its source in an imagination as open as Bessy's to the pathos of the personal appeal. But if he had the same sensi-

tiveness, how inferior were his means of expressing it! Again and again, during their talks, he had the feeling which had come to him when she bent over Dillon's bed—that her exquisite lines were, in some mystical sense, the visible flowering of her nature, that they had taken shape in response to the inward motions of the heart.

To a young man ruled by high enthusiasms there can be no more dazzling adventure than to work this miracle in the tender creature who yields her mind to his—to see, as it were, the blossoming of the spiritual seed in forms of heightened loveliness, the bluer beam of the eye, the richer curve of the lip, all the physical currents of life quickening under the breath of a kindled thought. It did not occur to him that any other emotion had effected the change he perceived. Bessy Westmore had in full measure that gift of unconscious hypocrisy which enables a woman to make the man in whom she is interested believe that she enters into all his thoughts. She had—more than this—the gift of self-deception, supreme happiness of the unreflecting nature, whereby she was able to believe herself solely engrossed in the subjects they discussed, to regard him as the mere spokesman of important ideas, thus saving their intercourse from present constraint, and from the awkward contemplation of future contingencies. So, in obedience to the ancient sorcery of life, these two groped for and found each other in regions seemingly so remote from the accredited domain of romance that it would have been as a great surprise to them to learn whither they had strayed as to see the arid streets of Westmore suddenly bursting into leaf.

With Mrs. Westmore's departure Amherst, for the first time, became aware of a certain flatness in his life. His daily task seemed dull and purposeless, and he was galled by Truscomb's studied forbearance, under which he suspected a quickly accumulating store of animosity. He almost longed for some collision which would release the manager's pent-up resentment; yet he dreaded increasingly any accident that might make his stay at Westmore impossible.

It was on Sundays, when he was freed from his weekly task, that he was most at the mercy of these opposing feelings. They drove him forth on long solitary walks beyond the town, walks ending most often in the deserted grounds of Hopewood, beautiful now in the ruined gold of October. As he sat under the beech-limbs above the river, watching its brown current sweep the willow-roots of the banks, he thought how this same current, within its next short reach, passed from wooded seclusion to the noise and pollution of the mills. So his own life seemed to have passed once more from the tranced flow of the last weeks into its old channel of unilluminated labour. But other thoughts came to him too: the vision of converting that melancholy pleasure-ground into an outlet for the cramped lives of the mill-workers; and he pictured the weed-grown lawns and paths thronged with holiday-makers, and the slopes nearer the factories dotted with houses and gardens.

An unexpected event revived these hopes. A few days before Christmas it became known to Hanaford that Mrs. Westmore would return for the holidays. Cicely was drooping in town air, and Bessy had persuaded Mr. Langhope that the bracing cold of Hana-

ford would be better for the child than the milder atmosphere of Long Island. They reappeared, and brought with them a breath of holiday cheerfulness such as Westmore had never known. It had always been the rule at the mills to let the operatives take their pleasure as they saw fit, and the Eldorado and the Hanaford saloons thrived on this policy. But Mrs. Westmore arrived full of festal projects. There was to be a giant Christmas tree for the mill-children, a supper on the same scale for the operatives, and a bout of skating and coasting at Hopewood for the older lads—the “band” and “bobbin” boys in whom Amherst had always felt a special interest. The Gaines ladies, resolved to show themselves at home in the latest philanthropic fashions, actively seconded Bessy’s endeavours, and for a week Westmore basked under a sudden heat-wave of beneficence.

The time had passed when Amherst might have made light of such efforts. With Bessy Westmore smiling up, holly-laden, from the foot of the ladder on which she kept him perched, how could he question the efficacy of hanging the opening-room with Christmas wreaths, or the ultimate benefit of gorging the operatives with turkey and sheathing their offspring in red mittens? It was just like the end of a story-book with a pretty moral, and Amherst was in the mood to be as much taken by the tinsel as the youngest mill-baby held up to gaze at the tree.

At the New Year, when Mrs. Westmore left, the negotiations for the purchase of the Eldorado were well advanced, and it was understood that on their completion she was to return for the opening of the night-

school and nursery. Suddenly, however, it became known that the proprietor of the road-house had decided not to sell. Amherst heard of the decision from Duplain, and at once foresaw the inevitable result—that Mrs. Westmore's plan would be given up owing to the difficulty of finding another site. Mr. Gaines and Truscomb had both discountenanced the erection of a special building for what was, after all, only a tentative enterprise. Among the purchasable houses in Westmore no other was suited to the purpose, and they had, therefore, a good excuse for advising Bessy to defer her experiment.

Almost at the same time, however, another piece of news changed the aspect of affairs. A scandalous occurrence at the Eldorado, witnesses to which were unexpectedly forthcoming, put it in Amherst's power to threaten the landlord with exposure unless he should at once accept the company's offer and withdraw from Westmore. Amherst had no long time to consider the best means of putting this threat into effect. He knew it was not only idle to appeal to Truscomb, but essential to keep the facts from him till the deed was done; yet how obtain the authority to act without him? The seemingly insuperable difficulties of the situation whetted Amherst's craving for a struggle. He thought first of writing to Mrs. Westmore; but now that the spell of her presence was withdrawn he felt how hard it would be to make her understand the need of prompt and secret action; and besides, was it likely that, at such short notice, she could command the needful funds? Prudence opposed the attempt, and on reflection he decided to appeal to Mr. Gaines, hoping that the

fragrancy of the case would rouse the President from his usual attitude of indifference.

Mr. Gaines was roused to the extent of showing a profound resentment against the cause of his disturbance. He relieved his sense of responsibility by some didactic remarks on the vicious tendencies of the working-classes, and concluded with the reflection that the more you did for them the less thanks you got. But when Amherst showed an unwillingness to let the matter rest on this time-honoured aphorism, the President retrenched himself behind ambiguities, suggestions that they should await Mrs. Westmore's return, and general considerations of a pessimistic nature, tapering off into a gloomy view of the weather.

"By God, I'll write to her!" Amherst exclaimed, as the Gaines portals closed on him; and all the way back to Westmore he was busy marshalling his arguments and entreaties.

He wrote the letter that night, but did not post it. Some unavowed distrust of her restrained him—a distrust not of her heart but of her intelligence. He felt that the whole future of Westmore was at stake, and decided to await the development of the next twenty-four hours. The letter was still in his pocket when, after dinner, he was summoned to the office by Truscomb.

That evening, when he returned home, he entered the little sitting-room without speaking. His mother sat there alone, in her usual place—how many nights he had seen the lamplight slant at that particular angle across her fresh cheek and the fine wrinkles about her eyes! He was going to add another wrinkle to the

number now—soon they would creep down and encroach upon the smoothness of the cheek.

She looked up and saw that his glance was turned to the crowded bookshelves behind her.

“There must be nearly a thousand of them,” he said as their eyes met.

“Books? Yes—with your father’s. Why—were you thinking . . .?” She started up suddenly and crossed over to him.

“Too many for wanderers,” he continued, drawing her hands to his breast; then, as she clung to him, weeping and trembling a little: “It had to be, mother,” he said, kissing her penitently where the fine wrinkles died into the cheek.

VIII.

AMHERST'S dismissal was not to take effect for a month; and in the interval he addressed himself steadily to his task.

He went through the routine of the work numbly; but his intercourse with the hands tugged at deep fibres of feelings. He had always shared, as far as his duties allowed, in the cares and interests of their few free hours: the hours when the automatic appendages of the giant machine became men and women again, with desires and passions of their own. Under Amherst's influence the mixed elements of the mill-community had begun to crystallise into social groups: his books had served as an improvised lending-library, he had organised a club, a rudimentary orchestra, and various other means of binding together the better spirits of the community. With the older men, the attractions of the Eldorado, and kindred inducements, often worked against him; but among the younger hands, and especially the boys, he had gained a personal ascendancy that it was bitter to relinquish.

It was the severing of this tie that cost him most pain in the final days at Westmore; and after he had done what he could to console his mother, and to put himself in the way of getting work elsewhere, he tried to see what might be saved out of the ruins of the little

polity he had built up. He hoped his influence might at least persist in the form of an awakened instinct of fellowship; and he gave every spare hour to strengthening the links he had tried to form. The boys, at any rate, would be honestly sorry to have him go: not, indeed, from the profounder reasons that affected him, but because he had not only stood persistently between the overseers and themselves, but had recognised their right to fun after work-hours as well as their right to protection while they worked.

In the glow of Mrs. Westmore's Christmas visitation an athletic club had been formed, and leave obtained to use the Hopewood grounds for Saturday afternoon sports; and thither Amherst continued to conduct the boys after the mills closed at the week-end. His last Saturday had now come: a shining afternoon of late February, with a red sunset bending above frozen river and slopes of unruffled snow. For an hour or more he had led the usual sports, coasting down the steep descent from the house to the edge of the woods, and skating and playing hockey on the rough river-ice which eager hands kept clear after every snow-storm. He always felt the contagion of these sports: the glow of movement, the tumult of young voices, the sting of the winter air, roused all the boyhood in his blood. But to-day he had to force himself through his part in the performance. To the very last, as he now saw, he had hoped for a sign in the heavens: not the reversal of his own sentence—for, merely on disciplinary grounds, he perceived that to be impossible—but something pointing to a change in the management of the mills, some proof that Mrs. Westmore's intervention had be-

tokened more than a passing impulse of compassion. Surely she would not accept without question the abandonment of her favourite scheme; and if she came back to put the question, the answer would lay bare the whole situation. . . . So Amherst's hopes had persuaded him; but the day before he had heard that she was to sail for Europe. The report, first announced in the papers, had been confirmed by his mother, who brought back from a visit to Hanaford the news that Mrs. Westmore was leaving at once for an indefinite period, and that the Hanaford house was to be closed. Irony would have been the readiest caustic for the wound inflicted; but Amherst, for that very reason, disdained it. He would not taint his disappointment with mockery, but would leave it among the unspoiled sadnesses of life. . . .

He flung himself into the boys' sports with his usual energy, meaning that their last Saturday with him should be their merriest; but he went through his part mechanically, and was glad when the sun began to dip toward the rim of the woods.

He was standing on the ice, where the river widened just below the house, when a jingle of bells broke on the still air, and he saw a sleigh driven rapidly up the avenue. Amherst watched it in surprise. Who, at that hour, could be invading the winter solitude of Hope-wood? The sleigh halted near the closed house, and a muffled figure, alighting alone, began to move down the snowy slope toward the skaters.

In an instant he had torn off his skates and was bounding up the bank. He would have known the figure anywhere—known that lovely poise of the head,

the mixture of hesitancy and quickness in the light tread which even the snow could not impede. Half-way up the slope to the house they met, and Mrs. Westmore held out her hand. Face and lips, as she stood above him, glowed with her swift passage through the evening air, and in the blaze of the sunset she seemed saturated with heavenly fires.

"I drove out to find you—they told me you were here—I arrived this morning, quite suddenly. . . ."

She broke off, as though the encounter had checked her ardour instead of kindling it; but he drew no discouragement from her tone.

"I hoped you would come before I left—I knew you would!" he exclaimed; and at his last words her face clouded anxiously.

"I didn't know you were leaving Westmore till yesterday—the day before—I got a letter. . . ." Again she wavered, perceptibly trusting her difficulty to him, in the sweet way he had been trying to forget; and he answered with recovered energy: "The great thing is that you should be here."

She shook her head at his optimism. "What can I do if you go?"

"You can give me a chance, before I go, to tell you a little about some of the loose ends I am leaving."

"But why are you leaving them? I don't understand. Is it inevitable?"

"Inevitable," he returned, with an odd glow of satisfaction in the word; and as her eyes besought him, he added, smiling: "I've been dismissed, you see; and from the manager's standpoint I think I deserved it. But the best part of my work needn't go with me,—and that is

what I should like to speak to you about. As assistant manager I can easily be replaced—have been, I understand, already; but among these boys here I should like to think that a little of me stayed—and it will, if you'll let me tell you what I've been doing."

She glanced away from him at the busy throng on the ice and at the other black cluster above the coasting-slide.

"How they're enjoying it!" she murmured. "What a pity it was never done before! And who will keep it up when you're gone?"

"You," he answered, meeting her eyes again; and as she coloured a little under his look he went on quickly: "Will you come over and look at the coasting? The time is almost up. One more slide and they'll be packing off to supper."

She nodded "yes," and they walked in silence over the white lawn, criss-crossed with tramplings of happy feet, to the ridge from which the coasters started on their run. Amherst's object in turning the talk had been to gain a moment's respite. He could not bear to waste his perfect hour in futile explanations: he wanted to keep it undisturbed by any thought of the future. And the same feeling seemed to possess his companion, for she did not speak again till they reached the knoll where the boys were gathered.

A sled packed with them hung on the brink: with a last shout it was off, dipping down the incline with the long curved flight of a swallow, flashing across the wide meadow at the base of the hill, and tossed upward again by its own impetus, till it vanished in the dark rim of wood on the opposite height. The lads waiting on the

knoll sang out for joy, and Bessy clapped her hands and joined with them.

"What fun! I wish I'd brought Cicely! I've not coasted for years," she laughed out, as the second detachment of boys heaped themselves on another sled and shot down. Amherst looked at her with a smile. He saw that every other feeling had vanished in the exhilaration of watching the flight of the sleds. She had forgotten why she had come—forgotten her distress at his dismissal—forgotten everything but the spell of the long white slope, and the tingle of cold in her veins.

"Shall we go down? Should you like it?" he asked, feeling no resentment under the heightened glow of his pulses.

"Oh, do take me—I shall love it!" Her eyes shone like a child's—she might have been a lovelier embodiment of the shouting boyhood about them.

The first band of coasters, sled at heels, had by this time already covered a third of the homeward stretch; but Amherst was too impatient to wait. Plunging down to the meadow he caught up the sled-rope, and raced back with the pack of rejoicing youth in his wake. The sharp climb up the hill seemed to fill his lungs with flame: his whole body burned with a strange intensity of life. As he reached the top, a distant bell rang across the fields from Westmore, and the boys began to snatch up their coats and mufflers.

"Be off with you—I'll look after the sleds," Amherst called to them as they dispersed; then he turned for a moment to see that the skaters below were also heeding the summons,

A cold pallor lay on the river-banks and on the low meadow beneath the knoll; but the woodland opposite stood black against scarlet vapours that ravelled off in sheer light toward a sky hung with an icy moon.

Amherst drew up the sled and held it steady while Bessy, seating herself, tucked her furs close with little breaks of laughter; then he placed himself in front.

“Ready?” he cried over his shoulder, and “Ready!” she called back.

Their craft quivered under them, hanging an instant over the long stretch of whiteness below; the level sun dazzled their eyes, and the first plunge seemed to dash them down into darkness. Amherst heard a cry of glee behind him; then all sounds were lost in the whistle of air humming by like the flight of a million arrows. They had dropped below the sunset and were tearing through the clear nether twilight of the descent; then, with a bound, the sled met the level, and shot away across the meadow toward the opposite height. It seemed to Amherst as though his body had been left behind, and only the spirit in him rode the wild blue currents of galloping air; but as the sled’s rush began to slacken with the strain of the last ascent he was recalled to himself by the touch of the breathing warmth at his back. Bessy had put out a hand to steady herself, and as she leaned forward, gripping his arm, a flying end of her furs swept his face. There was a delicious pang in being thus caught back to life; and as the sled stopped, and he sprang to his feet, he still glowed with the sensation. Bessy too was under the spell. In the dusk of the beech-grove where they had landed, he could barely distinguish her features; but her

eyes shone on him, and he heard her quick breathing as he stooped to help her to her feet.

"Oh, how beautiful—it's the only thing better than a good gallop!"

She leaned against a tree-bole, panting a little, and loosening her furs.

"What a pity it's too dark to begin again!" she sighed, looking about her through the dim weaving of leafless boughs.

"It's not so dark in the open—we might have one more," he proposed; but she shook her head, seized by a new whim.

"It's so still and delicious in here—did you hear the snow fall when that squirrel jumped across to the pine?" She tilted her head, narrowing her lids as she peered upward. "There he is! One gets used to the light. . . . Look! See his little eyes shining down at us!"

As Amherst looked where she pointed, the squirrel leapt to another tree, and they stole on after him through the hushed wood, guided by his grey flashes in the dimness. Here and there, in a break of the snow, they trod on a bed of wet leaves that gave out a breath of hidden life, or a hemlock twig dashed its spicy scent into their faces. As they grew used to the twilight their eyes began to distinguish countless delicate gradations of tint: cold mottlings of grey-black boles against the snow, wet russets of drifted beech-leaves, a distant network of mauve twigs melting into the woodland haze. And in the silence just such fine gradations of sound became audible: the soft drop of loosened snow-lumps, a stir of startled wings, the creak of a dead branch, somewhere far off in darkness.

They walked on, still in silence, as though they had entered the glade of an enchanted forest and were powerless to turn back or to break the hush with a word. They made no pretence of following the squirrel any longer; he had flashed away to a high tree-top, from which his ironical chatter pattered down on their unheeding ears. Amherst's sensations were not of that highest order of happiness where mind and heart mingle their elements in the strong draught of life: it was a languid fume that stole through him from the cup at his lips. But after the sense of defeat and failure which the last weeks had brought, the reaction was too exquisite to be analysed. All he asked of the moment was its immediate sweetness. . . .

They had reached the brink of a rocky glen where a little brook still sent its thread of sound through mufflings of ice and huddled branches. Bessy stood still a moment, bending her head to the sweet cold tinkle; then she moved away and said slowly: "We must go back."

As they turned to retrace their steps a yellow line of light through the tree-trunks showed them that they had not, after all, gone very deep into the wood. A few minutes' walk would restore them to the lingering daylight, and on the farther side of the meadow stood the sleigh which was to carry Bessy back to Hanaford. A sudden sense of the evanescence of the moment roused Amherst from his absorption. Before the next change in the fading light he would be back again among the ugly realities of life. Did she, too, hate to return to them? Or why else did she walk so slowly—why did

she seem as much afraid as himself to break the silence that held them in its magic circle?

A dead pine-branch caught in the edge of her skirt, and she stood still while Amherst bent down to release her. As she turned to help him he looked up with a smile.

"The wood doesn't want to let you go," he said.

She made no reply, and he added, rising: "But you'll come back to it—you'll come back often, I hope."

He could not see her face in the dimness, but her voice trembled a little as she answered: "I will do what you tell me—but I shall be alone—against all the others: they don't understand."

The simplicity, the helplessness, of the avowal, appealed to him not as a weakness but as a grace. He understood what she was really saying: "How can you desert me? How can you put this great responsibility on me, and then leave me to bear it alone?" and in the light of her unuttered appeal his action seemed almost like cruelty. Why had he opened her eyes to wrongs she had no strength to redress without his aid?

He could only answer, as he walked beside her toward the edge of the wood: "You will not be alone—in time you will make the others understand; in time they will be with you."

"Ah, you don't believe that!" she exclaimed, pausing suddenly, and speaking with an intensity of reproach that amazed him.

"I hope it, at any rate," he rejoined, pausing also. "And I'm sure that if you will come here oftener—if you'll really live among your people——"

"How can you say that, when you're deserting them?"

she broke in, with a feminine excess of inconsequence that fairly dashed the words from his lips.

“Deserting them? Don’t you understand——?”

“I understand that you’ve made Mr. Gaines and Truscomb angry—yes; but if I should insist on your staying——”

Amherst felt the blood rush to his forehead. “No—no, it’s not possible!” he exclaimed, with a vehemence addressed more to himself than to her.

“Then what will happen at the mills?”

“Oh, someone else will be found—the new ideas are stirring everywhere. And if you’ll only come back here, and help my successor——”

“Do you think they are likely to choose anyone else with your ideas?” she interposed with unexpected acuteness; and after a short silence he answered: “Not immediately, perhaps; but in time—in time there will be improvements.”

“As if the poor people could wait! Oh, it’s cruel, cruel of you to go!”

Her voice broke in a throb of entreaty that went to his inmost fibres.

“You don’t understand. It’s impossible in the present state of things that I should do any good by staying.”

“Then you refuse? Even if I were to insist on their asking you to stay, you would still refuse?” she persisted.

“Yes—I should still refuse.”

She made no answer, but moved a few steps nearer to the edge of the wood. The meadow was just below them now, and the sleigh in plain sight on the height beyond. Their steps made no sound on the sodden

drifts underfoot, and in the silence he thought he had caught a catch in her breathing. It was enough to make the brimming moment overflow. He stood still before her and bent his head to hers.

"Bessy!" he said, with sudden vehemence.

She did not speak or move, but in the quickest state of his perceptions he became aware that she was silently weeping. The gathering darkness under the trees enveloped them. It absorbed her outline into the shadowy background of the wood, from which she emerged in a faint spot of pallor; and the same scurity seemed to envelop his faculties, merging the hard facts of life in a blur of feeling in which the tinctest impression was the sweet sense of her tears.

"Bessy!" he exclaimed again; and as he drew a step nearer he felt her yield to him, and bury her head against his arm.

BOOK II.

IX.

—“BUT, Justine——”

Mrs. Harry Dressel, seated in the June freshness of her Oak Street drawing-room, and harmonising by her high lights and hard edges with the white-and-gold angularities of the best furniture, cast a rebuking eye on her friend Miss Brent, who stood arranging in a glass bowl the handful of roses she had just brought in from the garden.

Mrs. Dressel's intonation made it clear that the entrance of Miss Brent had been the signal for renewing an argument which the latter had perhaps left the room to escape.

“When you were here three years ago, Justine, I could understand your not wanting to go out, because you were in mourning for your mother—and besides, you'd volunteered for that bad surgical case in the Hope Hospital. But now that you've come back for a rest and a change I can't imagine why you persist in shutting yourself up—unless, of course,” she concluded, in a higher key of reproach, “it's because you think so little of Hanaford society——”

Justine Brent, putting the last rose in place, turned upon her task with a protesting gesture.

"My dear Effie, who am I to think little of any society, when I belong to none?" She passed a last light touch over the flowers, and crossing the room, brushed her friend's hand with the same caressing gesture.

Mrs. Dressel met it with an unrelenting turn of her plump shoulder, murmuring: "Oh, if you take *that* tone!" And on Miss Brent's gaily rejoicing: "Isn't it better than to have other people take it for me?" she replied, with an air of affront that expressed itself in a ruffling of her whole pretty person: "If you'll excuse my saying so, Justine, the fact that you are staying with *me* would be enough to make you welcome anywhere in Hanaford!"

"I'm sure of it, dear; so sure that my horrid pride rather resents being floated in on the high tide of such overwhelming credentials."

Mrs. Dressel glanced up doubtfully at the dark face laughing down on her. Though she was president of the Maplewood Avenue Book-club, and habitually figured in the society column of the "Banner" as one of the intellectual leaders of Hanaford, there were moments when her self-confidence trembled before Justine's light sallies. It was absurd, of course, given the relative situations of the two; and Mrs. Dressel, behind her friend's back, was quickly reassured by the thought that Justine was only a hospital nurse, who had to work for her living, and had really never "been anywhere;" but when Miss Brent's verbal arrows were flying, it seemed somehow of more immediate consequence that she was fairly well-connected, and lived in New York. No one placed a higher value on the

abstract qualities of wit and irony than Mrs. Dressel; the difficulty was that she never quite knew when Justine's retorts were loaded, or when her own susceptibilities were the target aimed at; and between her desire to appear to take the joke, and the fear of being ridiculed without knowing it, her pretty face often presented an interesting study in perplexity. As usual, she now took refuge in bringing the talk back to a personal issue.

"I can't imagine," she said, "why you won't go to the Gaines's garden-party. It's always the most brilliant affair of the season; and this year, with the John Amhersts here, and all their party—that fascinating Mrs. Eustace Ansell, and Mrs. Amherst's father, old Mr. Langhope, who is quite as quick and clever as *you* are—you certainly can't accuse us of being dull and provincial!"

Miss Brent smiled. "As far as I can remember, Effie, it is always you who accuse others of bringing that charge against Hanaford. For my part, I know too little of it to have formed any opinion; but whatever it may have to offer me, I am painfully conscious of having, at present, nothing but your kind commendation to give in return."

Mrs. Dressel rose impatiently. "How absurdly you talk! You're a little thinner than usual, and I don't like those dark lines under your eyes; but Westy Gaines told me yesterday that he thought you handsomer than ever, and that it was intensely becoming to some women to look over-tired."

"It's lucky I'm one of that kind," Miss Brent rejoined, between a sigh and a laugh, "and there's every

promise of my getting handsomer every day if somebody doesn't soon arrest the geometrical progression of my good looks by giving me the chance to take a year's rest!"

As she spoke, she stretched her arms above her head, with a gesture revealing the suppleness of her slim young frame, but also its tenuity of structure—the frailness of throat and shoulders, and the play of bones in the delicate neck. Justine Brent had one of those imponderable bodies that seem a mere pinch of matter shot through with light and colour. Though she did not flush easily, auroral lights ran under her clear skin, were lost in the shadows of her hair, and broke again in her eyes; and her voice seemed to shoot light too, as though her smile flashed back from her words as they fell—all her features being so fluid and changeable that the one solid thing about her was the massing of dense black hair which clasped her face like the noble metal of some antique bust.

Mrs. Dressel's face softened at the note of weariness in the girl's voice. "Are you very tired, dear?" she asked drawing her down to a seat on the sofa.

"Yes, and no—not so much bodily, perhaps, as in spirit." Justine Brent drew her brows together, and stared moodily at the thin brown hands interwoven between Mrs. Dressel's plump fingers. Seated thus, with hollowed shoulders and brooding head, she might have figured a young sibyl bowed above some mystery of fate; but the next moment her face, inclining toward her friend's, cast off its shadows and resumed the look of a plaintive child.

"The worst of it is that I don't look forward with

any interest to taking up the old drudgery again. Of course that loss of interest may be merely physical—I should call it so in a nervous patient, no doubt. But in myself it seems different—it seems to go to the roots of the world. You know it was always the imaginative side of my work that helped me over the ugly details—the pity and beauty that disinfected the physical horror; but now that feeling is lost, and only the mortal disgust remains. Oh, Effie, I don't want to be a ministering angel any more—I want to be uncertain, coy and hard to please. I want something dazzling and unaccountable to happen to me—something new and un-lived and indescribable!”

She snatched herself with a laugh from the bewildered Effie, and flinging up her arms again, spun on a light heel across the polished floor.

“Well, then,” murmured Mrs. Dressel with gentle obstinacy, “I can't see why in the world you won't go to the Gaines's garden-party!” And caught in the whirlwind of her friend's incomprehensible mirth, she still persisted, as she ducked her blonde head to it: “If you'll only let me lend you my dress with the Irish lace, you'll look smarter than anybody there. . .”

Before her toilet mirror, an hour later, Justine Brent seemed in a way to fulfill Mrs. Dressel's prediction. So mirror-like herself, she could no more help reflecting the happy effect of a bow or a feather than the subtler influence of word and look; and her face and figure were so new to the advantages of dress that, at four-and-twenty, she still produced the effect of a young girl in her first “good” frock. In Mrs. Dressel's festal

raiment, which her dark tints subdued to a quiet elegance, she was like the golden core of a pale rose illuminating and scenting its petals.

Three years of solitary life, following on a youth of confidential intimacy with the mother she had lost, had produced in her the quaint habit of half-loud soliloquy. "Fine feathers, Justine!" she laughed back at her laughing image. "You look like a phoenix risen from your ashes. But slip back into your own plumage, and you'll be no more than a little brown bird without a song!"

The luxurious suggestions of her dress, and the way her warm youth became it, drew her back to memories of a childhood nestled in beauty and gentle ways, before her handsome prodigal father had died, and her mother's face had grown pinched in the long struggle with poverty. But those memories were after all less dear to Justine than the grey years following, when, growing up, she had helped to clear a space in the wilderness for their tiny hearth-fire, when her own efforts had fed the flame and roofed it in from the weather. A great heat, kindled at that hearth, had burned in her veins, making her devour her work, lighting and warming the long cold days, and reddening the horizon through dark passages of revolt and failure; and she felt all the more deeply the chill of reaction that set in with her mother's death.

She thought she had chosen her work as a nurse in a spirit of high disinterestedness; but in the first hours of her bereavement it seemed as though only the personal aim had sustained her. For awhile, after this, her sick people became to her mere bundles of dis-

integrating matter, and she shrank from physical pain with a distaste the deeper because, mechanically, she could not help working on to relieve it. Gradually her sound nature passed out of this morbid phase, and she took up her task with deeper pity if less exalted ardour; glad to do her part in the vast impersonal labour of easing the world's misery, but longing with all the warm instincts of youth for a special load to lift, a single hand to clasp.

Ah, it was cruel to be alive, to be young, to bubble with springs of mirth and tenderness and folly, and to live in perpetual contact with decay and pain—to look persistently into the grey face of death without having lifted even a corner of life's veil! Now and then, when she felt her youth flame through the sheath of dullness which was gradually enclosing it, she rebelled at the conditions that tied a spirit like hers to its monotonous task, while others, without a quiver of wings on their dull shoulders, or a note of music in their hearts, had the whole wide world to range through, and saw in it no more than a frightful emptiness to be shut out with tight walls of habit. . .

A tap on the door announced Mrs. Dressel, garbed for conquest, and bestowing on her brilliant person the last anxious touches of the artist reluctant to part from a masterpiece.

"My dear, how well you look! I *knew* that dress would be becoming!" she exclaimed, generously transferring her self-approval to Justine; and adding, as the latter moved toward her: "I wish Westy Gaines could see you now!"

"Well, he will presently," Miss Brent rejoined, ignoring the slight stress on the name.

Mrs. Dressel continued to brood on her maternally. "Justine—I wish you'd tell me! You say you hate the life you're leading now—but isn't there somebody who might——?"

"Give me another, with lace dresses in it?" Justine's slight shrug might have seemed theatrical, had it not been a part of the ceaseless dramatic play of her flexible person. "There might be, perhaps. . . only I'm not sure—" She broke off whimsically.

"Not sure of what?"

"That this kind of dress might not always be a little tight on the shoulders."

"Tight on the shoulders? What do you mean, Justine? My clothes simply *hang* on you!"

"Oh, Effie dear, don't you remember the fable of the wings under the skin, that sprout when one meets a pair of kindred shoulders?" And, as Mrs. Dressel bent on her a brow of unenlightenment—"Well, it doesn't matter: I only meant that I've always been afraid good clothes might keep my wings from sprouting!" She turned back to the glass, giving herself a last light touch such as she had bestowed on the roses.

"And that reminds me," she continued—"how about Mr. Amherst's wings?"

"John Amherst?" Mrs. Dressel brightened into immediate attention. "Why, do you know him?"

"Not as the owner of the Westmore Mills; but I came across him as their assistant manager three years ago, at the Hope Hospital, and he was starting a very

promising pair then. I wonder if they're doing as well under his new coat."

"I'm not sure that I understand you when you talk poetry," said Mrs. Dressel with less interest; "but personally I can't say I like John Amherst—and he is certainly not worthy of such a lovely woman as Mrs. Westmore. Of course she would never let anyone see that she's not perfectly happy; but I'm told he has given them all a great deal of trouble by interfering in the management of the mills, and his manner is so cold and sarcastic—the truth is, I suppose he's never quite at ease in society. *Her* family have never been really reconciled to the marriage; and Westy Gaines says——"

"Ah, Westy Gaines *would*," Justine interposed lightly. "But if Mrs. Amherst is really the Bessy Langhope I used to know it must be rather a struggle for the wings!"

Mrs. Dressel's flagging interest settled on the one glimpse of fact in this statement. "It's such a coincidence that you should have known her too! Was she always so perfectly fascinating? I wish I knew how she gives that look to her hair!"

Justine gathered up the lace sunshade and long gloves which her friend had lent her. "There was not much more that was genuine about her character—that was her very own, I mean—than there is about my appearance at this moment. She was always the dearest little chameleon in the world, taking everybody's colour in the most flattering way, and giving back, I must say, a most charming reflection—if you'll excuse the mixed metaphor; but when one got her by herself, with no reflections to catch, one found she hadn't any particular colour of her own. One of the girls used to say she

ought to wear a tag, because she was so easily misled—Now then, I'm ready!"

Justine advanced to the door, and Mrs. Dressel followed her downstairs, reflecting with pardonable complacency that one of the disadvantages of being clever was that it tempted one to say sarcastic things of other women—than which she could imagine no more crying social error.

During the drive to the garden-party, Justine's thoughts, drawn to the past by the mention of Bessy Langhope's name, reverted to the comic inconsequences of her own lot—to that persistent irrelevance of incident that had once made her compare herself to an actor always playing his part before the wrong stage-setting. Was there not, for instance, a mocking incongruity in the fact that a creature so leaping with life should have, for chief outlet, the narrow mental channel of the excellent couple between whom she was now being borne to the Gaines's garden-party? All her friendships were the result of propinquity or of early association, and fate had held her imprisoned in a circle of well-to-do mediocrity, peopled by just such figures as those of the kindly and prosperous Dressels. Effie Dressel, the daughter of a cousin of Mrs. Brent's, had obscurely but safely allied herself with the heavy blond young man who was to succeed his father as President of the Union Bank, and who was already regarded by the "solid business interests" of Hanaford as possessing talents likely to carry him far in the development of the paternal fortunes. Harry Dressel's honest countenance gave no evidence of peculiar astuteness, and he

was in fact rather the product of special conditions than of an irresistible bent. He had the sound Saxon love of games, and the most interesting game he had ever been taught was "business." He was a simple domestic being, and according to Hanaford standards the most obvious obligation of the husband and father was to make his family richer. If Harry Dressel had ever formulated his aims, he might have said that he wanted to be the man whom Hanaford most respected, and that was only another way of saying, the richest man in Hanaford. Effie embraced his creed with a zeal facilitated by such evidence of its soundness as a growing income and the early prospects of a carriage. Her mother-in-law, a kind old lady with a simple unquestioning love of money, had told her on her wedding day that Harry's one object would always be to make his family proud of him; and the recent purchase of the victoria in which Justine and the Dressels were now seated was regarded by the family as a striking fulfilment of this prophecy.

In the course of her hospital work Justine had of necessity run across far different types; but from the connections thus offered she was often held back by the subtler shades of taste that civilise human intercourse. Her world, in short, had been chiefly peopled by the dull or the crude, and, hemmed in between the two, she had created for herself an inner kingdom where the fastidiousness she had to set aside in her outward relations recovered its full sway. There must be actual beings worthy of admission to this secret precinct, but hitherto they had not come her way; and the sense that they were somewhere just out of reach still gave an

edge of youthful curiosity to each encounter with a new group of people.

Certainly, Mrs. Gaines's garden-party seemed an unlikely field for the exercise of such curiosity: Justine's few glimpses of Hanaford society had revealed it as rather a dull thick body, with a surface stimulated only by ill-advised references to the life of larger capitals; and the concentrated essence of social Hanaford was of course to be found at the Gaines's entertainments. It presented itself, however, in the rich June afternoon, on the long shadows of the well-kept lawn, and among the paths of the rose-garden, in its most amiable aspect; and to Justine, wearied by habitual contact with ugliness and suffering, there was pure delight in the verdant setting of the picture, and in the light harmonious tints of the figures peopling it. If the company was dull, it was at least decorative; and poverty, misery and dirt were shut out by the placid unconsciousness of the guests as securely as by the leafy barriers of the garden.

X.

“AH, Mrs. Dressel, we were on the lookout for you—waiting for the curtain to rise. Your friend Miss Brent? Juliana, Mrs. Dressel’s friend Miss Brent——”

Near the brilliantly-striped marquee that formed the axis of the Gaines’s garden-parties, Mr. Halford Gaines, a few paces from his wife and daughters, stood radiating a royal welcome on the stream of visitors pouring across the lawn. It was only to eyes perverted by a different social perspective that there could be any doubt as to the importance of the Gaines’s entertainments. To Hanaford itself they were epoch-making; and if any rebellious spirit had cherished a doubt of the fact, it would have been quelled by the official majesty of Mr. Gaines’s frock-coat and the comprehensive cordiality of his manner.

There were moments when New York hung like a quieting cloud on the social horizon of Mrs. Gaines and her daughters; but to Halford Gaines Hanaford was all in all. As an exponent of the popular and patriotic “good-enough-for-me” theory he stood in high favour at the Hanaford Club, where a too-keen consciousness of the metropolis was alternately combated by easy allusion and studied omission, and where the unsettled fancies of youth were chastened and steadied by the reflection that, if Hanaford was good enough for

Halford Gaines, it must offer opportunities commensurate with the larger ideas of life.

Never did Mr. Gaines's manner bear richer witness to what could be extracted from Hanaford than when he was in the act of applying to it the powerful pressure of his hospitality. The resultant essence was so bubbling with social exhilaration that, to its producer at any rate, its somewhat mixed ingredients were lost in one highly flavoured draught. Under ordinary circumstances no one discriminated more keenly than Mr. Gaines between different shades of social importance; but anyone who was entertained by him was momentarily ennobled by the fact, and not all the anxious telegraphy of his wife and daughters could, for instance, recall to him that the striking young woman in Mrs. Dressel's wake was only some obscure *protégée*, whom it was odd of Effie to have brought, and whose presence was quite unnecessary to emphasise.

"Juliana, Miss Brent tells me she has never seen our roses. Oh, there are other roses in Hanaford, Miss Brent; I don't mean to imply that no one else attempts them; but unless you can afford to give *carte blanche* to your man—and mine happens to be something of a specialist. . . well, if you'll come with me, I'll let them speak for themselves. I always say that if people want to know what we can do they must come and see—they'll never find out from *me!*"

A more emphatic signal from his wife arrested Mr. Gaines as he was in the act of leading Miss Brent away.

"Eh?—What? The Amhersts and Mrs. Ansell? You must excuse me then, I'm afraid—but Westy shall take you. Westy, my boy, it's an ill wind. . . I want you to

show this young lady our roses." And Mr. Gaines, with mingled reluctance and satisfaction, turned away to receive the most important guests of the day.

It had not needed his father's summons to draw the expert Westy to Miss Brent: he was already gravitating toward her, with the nonchalance bred of cosmopolitan successes, but with a directness of aim due also to his larger opportunities of comparison.

"The roses will do," he explained, as he guided her through the increasing circle of guests about his mother; and in answer to Justine's glance of inquiry: "To get you away, I mean. They're not much in themselves, you know; but everything of the governor's always begins with a capital letter."

"Oh, but these roses deserve to," Justine exclaimed, as they paused under the evergreen archway at the farther end of the lawn.

"I don't know—not if you've been in England," Westy murmured, watching furtively for the impression produced, on one who had presumably not, by the great blush of colour massed against its dusky background of clipped evergreens.

Justine smiled. "I *have* been—but I've been in the slums since; in horrible places that the least of those flowers would have lighted up like a lamp."

Westy's guarded glance imprudently softened. "It's the beastliest kind of a shame, your ever having had to do such work——"

"Oh, *had* to?" she flashed back at him disconcertingly. "It was my choice, you know: there was a time when I couldn't live without it. Philanthropy is one of the subtlest forms of self-indulgence."

Westy met this with a vague laugh. If a chap who was as knowing as the devil *did*, once in a way, indulge himself in the luxury of talking recklessly to a girl with exceptional eyes, it was rather upsetting to discover in those eyes no consciousness of the risk he had taken!

"But I *am* rather tired of it now," she continued, and his look grew guarded again. After all, they were all the same—except in that particular matter of the eyes. At the thought, he risked another look, hung on the sharp edge of betrayal, and was snatched back, not by the manly instinct of self-preservation, but by some imp of mockery lurking in the depths that lured him.

He recovered his balance and took refuge in a tone of worldly ease. "I saw a chap the other day who said he knew you when you were at Saint Elizabeth's—wasn't that the name of your hospital?"

Justine assented. "One of the doctors, I suppose. Where did you meet him?"

Ah, *now* she should see! He summoned his utmost carelessness of tone. "Down on Long Island last week—I was spending Sunday with the Amhersts." He held up the glittering fact to her, and watched for the least little blink of awe; but her lids never trembled. It was a confession of social blindness which painfully negated Mrs. Dressel's hint that she knew the Amhersts; if she had even known *of* them, she could not so fatally have missed his point.

"Long Island?" She drew her brows together in puzzled retrospection. "I wonder if it could have been Stephen Wyant? I heard he had taken over his uncle's practice somewhere near New York."

"Wyant—that's the name. He's the doctor at Clif—the nearest town to the Amhersts' place. Little ely had a cold—Cicely Westmore, you know—a ll cousin of mine, by the way—" he switched a rose- nch loftily out of her path, explaining, as she moved that Cicely was the daughter of Mrs. Amherst's first riage to Richard Westmore. "That's the way I pened to see this Dr. Wyant. Bessy—Mrs. Amherst asked him to stop to luncheon, after he'd seen the . He seems rather a discontented sort of a chap— mbling at not having a New York practice. I should e thought he had rather a snug berth, down there at brook, with all those swells to dose."

Justine smiled. "Dr. Wyant is ambitious, and swells r't have as interesting diseases as poor people. One s tired of giving them bread pills for imaginary ail- nts. But Dr. Wyant is not strong himself and I fancy ountry practice is better for him than hard work in n."

"You think him clever though, do you?" Westy in- red absently. He was already bored with the subject the Long Island doctor, and vexed at the lack of ception that led his companion to show more con- n in the fortunes of a country practitioner than in the of his own visit to the Amhersts; but the topic was afe one, and it was agreeable to see how her face lled when she was interested.

Justine mused on his question. "I think he has very at promise—which he is almost certain not to fulfil,"

answered with a sigh which seemed to Westy's :ious ear to betray a more than professional interest the person referred to.

"Oh, come now—why not? With the Amhersts to give him a start—I heard my cousin recommending him to a lot of people the other day——"

"Oh, he may become a fashionable doctor," Justine assented indifferently; to which her companion rejoined, with a puzzled stare: "That's just what I mean—with Bessy backing him!"

"Has Mrs. Amherst become such a power, then?" Justine asked, taking up the coveted theme just as he despaired of attracting her to it.

"My cousin?" he stretched the two syllables to the cracking-point. "Well, she's awfully rich, yon know; and there's nobody smarter. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know; it's so long since I've seen her."

He brightened. "You *did* know her, then?" But the discovery made her obtuseness the more inexplicable!

"Oh, centuries ago: in another world."

"*Centuries*—I like that!" Westy gallantly protested, his ardour kindling as she swam once more within his social ken. "And Amherst? You know him too, I suppose? By Jove, here he is now——"

He signalled a tall figure strolling slowly toward them with bent head and brooding gaze. Justine's eye had retained a vivid image of the man with whom, scarcely three years earlier, she had lived through a moment of such poignant intimacy, and she recognised at once his lean outline, and the keen spring of his features, still veiled by the same look of inward absorption. She noticed, as he raised his hat in response to Westy Gaines's greeting, that the vertical lines between his brows had deepened; and a moment later she was aware that this change was the visible token of

others which went deeper than the fact of his good clothes and his general air of leisure and well-being—changes perceptible to her only in the startled sense of how prosperity had aged him.

“Hallo, Amherst—trying to get under cover?” Westy jovially accosted him, with a significant gesture toward the crowded lawn from which the new-comer had evidently fled. “I was just telling Miss Brent that this is the safest place on these painful occasions—Oh, confound it, it’s not as safe as I thought! Here’s one of my sisters making for me!”

There ensued a short conflict of words, before his feeble flutter of resistance was borne down by a resolute Miss Gaines who, as she swept him back to the marquee, cried out to Amherst that her mother was asking for him too; and then Justine had time to observe that her remaining companion had no intention of responding to his hostess’s appeal.

Westy, in naming her, had laid just enough stress on the name to let it serve as a reminder or an introduction, as circumstances might decide, and she saw that Amherst, roused from his abstraction by the proffered clue, was holding his hand out doubtfully.

“I think we haven’t met for some years,” he said.

Justine smiled. “I have a better reason than you for remembering the exact date;” and in response to his look of surprise she added: “You made me commit a professional breach of faith, and I’ve never known since whether to be glad or sorry.”

Amherst still bent on her the gaze which seemed to find in external details an obstacle rather than a help

to recognition; but suddenly his face cleared. "It was you who told me the truth about poor Dillon! I couldn't imagine why I seemed to see you in such a different setting. . ."

"Oh, I'm disguised as a lady this afternoon," she said smiling. "But I'm glad you saw through the disguise."

He smiled back at her. "Are you? Why?"

"It seems to make it—if it's so transparent—less of a sham, less of a dishonesty," she began impulsively, and then paused again, a little annoyed at the overemphasis of her words. Why was she explaining and excusing herself to this stranger? Did she propose to tell him next that she had borrowed her dress from Effie Dressel? To cover her confusion she went on with a slight laugh: "But you haven't told me."

"What was I to tell you?"

"Whether to be glad or sorry that I broke my vow and told the truth about Dillon."

They were standing face to face in the solitude of the garden-walk, forgetful of everything but the sudden surprised sense of intimacy that had marked their former brief communion. Justine had raised her eyes half-laughingly to Amherst, but they dropped before the unexpected seriousness of his.

"Why do you want to know?" he asked.

She made an effort to sustain the note of pleasantry.

"Well—it might, for instance, determine my future conduct. You see I'm still a nurse, and such problems are always likely to present themselves."

"Ah, then don't!"

"Don't?"

"I mean—" He hesitated a moment, reaching up to break a rose from the branch that tapped his shoulder. "I was only thinking what risks we run when we scramble into the chariot of the gods and try to do the driving. Be passive—be passive, and you'll be happier!"

"Oh, as to that—!" She swept it aside with one of her airy motions. "But Dillon, for instance—would *he* have been happier if I'd been passive?"

Amherst seemed to ponder. "There again—how can one tell?"

"And the risk's not worth taking?"

"No!"

She paused, and they looked at each other again. "Do you mean that seriously, I wonder? Do you——"

"Act on it myself? God forbid! The gods drive so badly. There's poor Dillon. . . he happened to be in their way. . . as we all are at times." He pulled himself up, and went on in a matter-of-fact tone: "In Dillon's case, however, my axioms don't apply. When my wife heard the truth she was, of course, immensely kind to him; and if it hadn't been for you she might never have known."

Justine smiled. "I think you would have found out—I was only the humble instrument. But now—" she hesitated—"now you must be able to do so much—"

Amherst lifted his head, and she saw the colour rise under his fair skin. "Out at Westmore? You've never been there since? Yes—my wife has made some changes; but it's all so problematic—and one would have to live here. . ."

"You don't, then?"

He answered by an imperceptible shrug. "Of course

I'm here often; and she comes now and then. But the journey's tiresome, and it is not always easy for her to get away." He checked himself, and Justine saw that he, in turn, was suddenly conscious of the incongruity of explaining and extenuating his personal situation to a stranger. "But then we're *not* strangers!" a voice in her exulted, just as he added, with an embarrassed attempt to efface and yet justify his moment of expansion: "That reminds me—I think you know my wife. I heard her asking Mrs. Dressel about you. She wants so much to see you."

The transition had been effected, at the expense of dramatic interest, but to the obvious triumph of social observances; and to Justine, after all, regaining at his side the group about the marquee, the interest was not so much diminished as shifted to the no less suggestive problem of studying the friend of her youth in the unexpected character of John Amherst's wife.

Meanwhile, however, during the brief transit across the Gaines greensward, her thoughts were still busy with Amherst. She had seen at once that the peculiar sense of intimacy reawakened by their meeting had been chilled and deflected by her first allusion to the topic which had previously brought them together: Amherst had drawn back as soon as she named the mills. What could be the cause of his reluctance? When they had last met, the subject burned within him: her being in actual fact a stranger had not, then, been an obstacle to his confidences. Now that he was master at Westmore it was plain that another tone became him—that his situation necessitated a greater reserve; but her inquiry did not imply the least wish

to overstep this restriction: it merely showed her remembrance of his frankly-avowed interest in the operatives. Justine was struck by the fact that so natural an allusion should put him on the defensive. She did not for a moment believe that he had lost his interest in the mills; and that his point of view should have shifted with the fact of ownership she rejected as an equally superficial reading of his character. The man with whom she had talked at Dillon's bedside was one in whom the ruling purposes had already shaped themselves, and to whom life, in whatever form it came, must henceforth take their mould. As she reached this point in her analysis, it occurred to her that his shrinking from the subject might well imply not indifference, but a deeper preoccupation: a preoccupation for some reason suppressed and almost disavowed, yet sustaining the more intensely its painful hidden life. From this inference it was but a leap of thought to the next—that the cause of the change must be sought outside of himself, in some external influence strong enough to modify the innate lines of his character. And where could such an influence be more obviously sought than in the marriage which had transformed the assistant manager of the Westmore Mills not, indeed, into their owner—that would rather have tended to simplify the problem—but into the husband of Mrs. Westmore? After all, the mills were Bessy's—and for a further understanding of the case it remained to find out what manner of person Bessy had become.

Justine's first impression, as her friend's charming arms received her—with an eagerness of welcome not lost on the suspended judgment of feminine Hanaford

—the immediate impression was of a gain of emphasis, of individuality, as though the fluid creature she remembered had belied her prediction, and run at last into a definite mould. Yes—Bessy had acquired an outline: a graceful one, as became her early promise, though with, perhaps, a little more sharpness of edge than her youthful texture had promised. But the side she turned to her friend was still all softness—had in it a hint of the old pliancy, the impulse to lean and enlase, that at once woke in Justine the corresponding instinct of guidance and protection, so that their first kiss, before a word was spoken, carried the two back to the precise relation in which their school-days had left them. So easy a reversion to the past left no room for the sense of subsequent changes by which such reunions are sometimes embarrassed. Justine's sympathies had, instinctively, and almost at once, transferred themselves to Bessy's side—passing over at a leap the pained recognition that there *were* sides already—and Bessy had gathered up Justine into the circle of gentle self-absorption which left her very dimly aware of any distinctive characteristic in her friends except that of their affection for herself—since she asked only, as she appealingly put it, that they should all be “dreadfully fond” of her.

“And I've wanted you so often, Justine: you're the only clever person I'm not afraid of, because your cleverness always used to make things clear instead of confusing them. I've asked so many people about you—but I never heard a word till just the other day—wasn't it odd?—when our new doctor at Rushton happened to say that he knew you. I've been rather unwell lately

—nervous and tired, and sleeping badly—and he told me I ought to keep perfectly quiet, and be under the care of a nurse who could make me do as she chose: just such a nurse as a wonderful Miss Brent he had known at St. Elizabeth's, whose patients obeyed her as if she'd been the colonel of a regiment. His description made me laugh, it reminded me so much of the way you used to make me do what you wanted at the convent—and then it suddenly occurred to me that I had heard of your having gone in for nursing, and we compared notes, and I found it was really you! Wasn't it odd that we should discover each other in that way? I daresay we might have passed in the street and never known it—I'm sure I must be horribly changed . . .”

Thus Bessy discoursed, in the semi-isolation to which, under an overarching beech-tree, the discretion of their hostess had allowed the two friends to withdraw for the freer exchange of confidences. There was, at first sight, nothing in her aspect to bear out Mrs. Amherst's plaintive allusion to her health, but Justine, who knew that she had lost a baby a few months previously, assumed that the effect of this shock still lingered, though evidently mitigated by a reviving interest in pretty clothes and the other ornamental accessories of life. Certainly Bessy Amherst had grown into the full loveliness which her childhood promised. She had the kind of finished prettiness that declares itself early, holds its own through the awkward transitions of girlhood, and resists the strain of all later vicissitudes, as though miraculously preserved in some clear medium impenetrable to the wear and tear of living.

“You absurd child! You're not changed a bit except

to grow more so!" Justine laughed, paying amused tribute to the childish craving for "a compliment" that still betrayed itself in Bessy's eyes.

"Well, *you* have, then, Justine—you've grown extraordinarily handsome!"

"That *is* extraordinary of me, certainly," the other acknowledged gaily. "But then think what room for improvement there was—and how much time I've had to improve in!"

"It is a long time, isn't it?" Bessy assented. "I feel so intimate, still, with the old Justine of the convent, and I don't know the new one a bit. Just think—I've a great girl of my own, almost as old as we were when we went to the Sacred Heart. But perhaps you don't know anything about me either. You see, I married again two years ago, and my poor baby died last March . . . so I have only Cicely. It was such a disappointment—I wanted a boy dreadfully, and I understand little babies so much better than a big girl like Cicely. . . . Oh, dear, here is Juliana Gaines bringing up some more tiresome people! It's such a bore, but John says I must know them all. Well, thank goodness we've only one more day in this dreadful place—and of course I shall see you, dear, before we go. . ."



AFTER conducting Miss Brent to his wife, John Amherst, by the exercise of considerable strategic skill, had once more contrived to detach himself from the throng on the lawn, and, regaining a path in the shrubbery, had taken refuge on the verandah of the house.

Here, under the shade of the awning, two ladies were seated in a seclusion agreeably tempered by the distant strains of the Hanaford band, and by the shifting prospect of the groups below them.

"Ah, here he is now!" the younger of the two exclaimed, turning on Amherst the smile of intelligence that Mrs. Eustace Ansell was in the habit of substituting for the idle preliminaries of conversation. "We were not talking of you, though," she added as Amherst took the seat to which his mother beckoned him, "but of Bessy—which, I suppose, is almost as indiscreet."

She added the last phrase after an imperceptible pause, and as if in deprecation of the hardly more perceptible frown which, at the mention of his wife's name, had deepened the lines between Amherst's brows.

"Indiscreet of his own mother and his wife's friend?" Mrs. Amherst protested, laying her trimly-gloved hand on her son's arm; while the latter, with his

eyes on her companion, said slowly: "Mrs. Ansell knows that indiscretion is the last fault of which her friends are likely to accuse her."

"*Raison de plus*, you mean?" she laughed, meeting squarely the challenge that passed between them under Mrs. Amherst's puzzled gaze. "Well, if I take advantage of my reputation for discretion to meddle a little now and then, at least I do so in a good cause. I was just saying how much I wish that you would take Bessy to Europe; and I am so sure of my cause, in this case, that I am going to leave it to your mother to give you my reasons."

She rose as she spoke, not with any sign of haste or embarrassment, but as if gracefully recognising the desire of mother and son to be alone together; but Amherst, rising also, made a motion to detain her.

"No one else will be able to put your reasons half so convincingly," he said with a slight smile, "and I am sure my mother would much rather be spared the attempt."

Mrs. Ansell met the smile as freely as she had met the challenge. "My dear Lucy," she rejoined, laying, as she reseated herself, a light caress on Mrs. Amherst's hand, "I'm sorry to be flattered at your expense, but it's not in human nature to resist such an appeal. You see," she added, raising her eyes to Amherst, "how sure I am of myself—and of *you*, when you've heard me."

"Oh, John is always ready to hear one," his mother murmured innocently.

"Well, I don't know that I shall even ask him to do as much as that—I'm so sure, after all, that my suggestion carries its explanation with it."

There was a moment's pause, during which Amherst let his eyes wander absently over the dissolving groups on the lawn.

"The suggestion that I should take Bessy to Europe?" He paused again. "When—next autumn?"

"No: now—at once. On a long honeymoon."

He frowned slightly at the last word, passing it by to revert to the direct answer to his question.

"At once? No—I can't see that the suggestion carries its explanation with it."

Mrs. Ansell looked at him hesitatingly. She was conscious of the ill-chosen word that still reverberated between them, and the unwonted sense of having blundered made her, for the moment, less completely mistress of herself.

"Ah, you'll see farther presently—" She rose again, unfurling her lace sunshade, as if to give a touch of definiteness to her action. "It's not, after all," she added, with a sweet frankness, "a case for argument, and still less for persuasion. My reasons are excellent—I should insist on putting them to you myself if they were not! But they're so good that I can leave you to find them out—and to back them up with your own, which will probably be a great deal better."

She summed up with a light nod, which included both Amherst and his mother, and turning to descend the verandah steps, waved a signal to Mr. Langhope, who was limping disconsolately toward the house.

"What has she been saying to you, mother?" Amherst asked, returning to his seat beside his mother.

Mrs. Amherst replied by a shake of her head and

a raised forefinger of reproof. "Now, Johnny, I won't answer a single question till you smoothe out those lines between your eyes."

Her son relaxed his frown to smile back at her. "Well, dear, there have to be some wrinkles in every family, and as you absolutely refuse to take your share—" His eyes rested affectionately on the frosty sparkle of her charming old face, which had, in its setting of recovered prosperity, the freshness of a sunny winter morning, when the very snow gives out a suggestion of warmth.

He remembered how, on the evening of his dismissal from the mills, he had paused on the threshold of their sitting-room to watch her a moment in the lamplight, and had thought with bitter compunction of the fresh wrinkle he was about to add to the lines about her eyes. The three years which followed had effaced that wrinkle and veiled the others in a tardy bloom of well-being. From the moment of turning her back on Westmore, and establishing herself in the pretty little house at Hanaford which her son's wife had placed at her disposal, Mrs. Amherst had shed all traces of the difficult years; and the fact that his marriage had enabled him to set free, before it was too late, the pent-up springs of her youthfulness, sometimes seemed to Amherst the clearest gain in his life's confused total of profit and loss. It was, at any rate, the sense of Bessy's share in the change that softened his voice when he spoke of her to his mother.

"Now, then, if I present a sufficiently unruffled surface, let us go back to Mrs. Ansell—for I confess that her mysterious reasons are not yet apparent to me."

Mrs. Amherst looked deprecatingly at her son. "Maria Ansell is devoted to you too, John——"

"Of course she is! It's her *rôle* to be devoted to everybody—especially to her enemies."

"Her enemies?"

"Oh, I didn't intend any personal application. But why does she want me to take Bessy abroad?"

"She and Mr. Langhope think that Bessy is not looking well."

Amherst paused, and the frown showed itself for a moment. "What do *you* think, mother?"

"I hadn't noticed it myself: Bessy seems to me prettier than ever. But perhaps she has less colour—and she complains of not sleeping. Maria thinks she still frets over the baby."

Amherst made an impatient gesture. "Is Europe the only panacea?"

"You should consider, John, that Bessy is used to change and amusement. I think you sometimes forget that other people haven't your faculty of absorbing themselves in a single interest. And Maria says that the new doctor at Clifton, whom they seem to think so clever, is very anxious that Bessy should go to Europe this summer."

"No doubt; and so is everyone else: I mean her father and old Tredegar—and your friend Mrs. Ansell not least."

Mrs. Amherst lifted her bright black eyes to his. "Well, then—if they all think she needs it——"

"Good heavens, if travel were what she needed!—Why, we've never stopped travelling since we married. We've been everywhere on the globe except at Hana-

ford—this is her second visit here in three years!” He rose and took a rapid turn across the deserted verandah. “It’s not because her health requires it—it’s to get me away from Westmore, to prevent things being done there that ought to be done!” he broke out vehemently, halting again before his mother.

The aged pink faded from Mrs. Amherst’s face, but her eyes retained their lively glitter. “To prevent things being done? What a strange thing to say!”

“I shouldn’t have said it if I hadn’t seen you falling under Mrs. Ansell’s spell.”

His mother had a gesture which showed from whom he had inherited his impulsive movements. “Really, my son—” She folded her hands, and added after a pause of self-recovery: “If you mean that I have ever attempted to interfere——”

“No, no: but when they pervert things so damnably——”

“John!”

He dropped into his chair again, and pushed the hair from his forehead with a groan.

“Well, then—put it that they have as much right to their view as I have: I only want you to see what it is. Whenever I try to do anything at Westmore—to give a real start to the work that Bessy and I planned together—some pretext is found to stop it: to pack us off to the ends of the earth, to cry out against reducing her income, to encourage her in some new extravagance to which the work at the mills must be sacrificed!”

Mrs. Amherst, growing pale under this outbreak, as

sured herself by a nervous backward glance that their privacy was still uninvaded; then her eyes returned to her son's face.

"John—are you sure you're not sacrificing your wife to the mills?"

He grew pale in turn, and they looked at each other for a moment without speaking.

"You see it as they do, then?" he rejoined with a discouraged sigh.

"I see it as any old woman would, who had my experiences to look back to."

"Mother!" he exclaimed.

She smiled composedly. "Do you think I mean that as a reproach? That's because men will never understand women—least of all, sons their mothers. No real mother wants to come first; she puts her son's career ahead of everything. But it's different with a wife—and a wife as much in love as Bessy."

Amherst looked away. "I should have thought that was a reason——"

"That would reconcile her to being set aside, to counting only second in your plans?"

"They were *her* plans when we married!"

"Ah, my dear——" She paused on that, letting her shrewd old glance, and all the delicate lines of experience in her face, supply what further comment the ineptitude of his argument invited.

He took the full measure of her meaning, receiving it in a baffled silence that continued as she rose and gathered her lace mantle about her, as if to signify that their confidences could not, on such an occasion, be further prolonged without singularity. Then he stood

up also and joined her, resting his hand on hers while she leaned on the verandah rail.

"Poor mother! And I've kept you to myself all this time, and spoiled your good afternoon."

"No, dear; I was a little tired, and had slipped away to be quiet." She paused, and then went on, persuasively giving back his pressure: "I know how you feel about doing your duty, John; but now that things are so comfortably settled, isn't it a pity to unsettle them?"

Amherst had intended, on leaving his mother, to rejoin Bessy, whom he could still discern, on the lawn, in absorbed communion with Miss Brent; but after what had passed it seemed impossible, for the moment, to recover the garden-party tone, and he made his escape through the house while a trio of Cuban singers, who formed the crowning number of the entertainment, gathered the company in a denser circle about their guitars.

As he walked on aimlessly under the deep June shadows of Maplewood Avenue his mother's last words formed an ironical accompaniment to his thoughts. "Now that things are comfortably settled—" he knew so well what that elastic epithet covered! Himself, for instance, ensconced in the impenetrable prosperity of his wonderful marriage; herself too (unconsciously, dear soul!), so happily tucked away in a cranny of that new and spacious life, and no more able to conceive why existing conditions should be disturbed than the bird in the eaves understands why the house should be torn down. Well—he had learned at last what his ex-

perience with his poor, valiant, puzzled mother might have taught him: that one must never ask from women any view but the personal one, any measure of conduct but that of their own pains and pleasures. She, indeed, had borne undauntedly enough the brunt of their earlier trials; but that was merely because, as she said, the mother's instinct bade her heap all her private hopes on the great devouring altar of her son's ambition; it was not because she had ever, in the very least, understood or sympathised with his aims.

And Bessy—? Perhaps if their little son had lived she might in turn have obeyed the world-old instinct of self-effacement—but now! He remembered with an intenser self-derision that, not even in the first surprise of his passion, had he deluded himself with the idea that Bessy Westmore was an exception to her sex. He had argued rather that, being only a lovelier product of the common mould, she would abound in the adaptabilities and pliancies which the lords of the earth have seen fit to cultivate in their companions. She would care for his aims because they were his. During their precipitate wooing, and through the first brief months of marriage, this profound and original theory had been gratifyingly confirmed; then its perfect surface had begun to show a flaw. Amherst had always conveniently supposed that the poet's line summed up the good woman's rule of ethics: *He for God only, she for God in him*. It was for the god in him, surely, that she had loved him: for that first glimpse of an "ampler ether, a diviner air" that he had brought into her cramped and curtained life. He could never, now, evoke that earlier delusion without feeling on its still tender

surface the keen edge of Mrs. Ansell's smile. She, no doubt, could have told him at any time why Bessy had married him: it was for his *beaux yeux*, as Mrs. Ansell would have put it—because he was young, handsome, persecuted, an ardent lover if not a subtle one—because Bessy had met him at the fatal moment, because her family had opposed the marriage—because, in brief, the gods, that day, may have been a little short of amusement. Well, they were having their laugh out now—there were moments when high heaven seemed to ring with it. . .

With these thoughts at his heels Amherst strode on, overtaken now and again by the wheels of departing guests from the garden-party, and knowing, as they passed him, what was in their minds—envy of his success, admiration of his cleverness in achieving it, and a little half-contemptuous pity for his wife, who, with her wealth and looks, might have done so much better. Certainly, if the case could have been put to Hanaford—the Hanaford of the Gaines's garden-party—it would have sided with Bessy to a voice. And how much justice was there in what he felt would have been the unanimous verdict of her class? Was his mother right in hinting that he was sacrificing Bessy to the mills? But the mills *were* Bessy—at least he had thought so when he married her! They were her particular form of contact with life, the expression of her relation to her fellow-men, her pretext, her opportunity—unless they were merely a vast purse in which to plunge for her pin-money! He had fancied it would rest with him to determine from which of these stand-points she should view Westmore; and at the outset she had enthusiastic-

ally viewed it from his. In her eager adoption of his ideas she had made a pet of the mills, organising the Mothers' Club, laying out a recreation-ground on the Hopewood property, and playing with pretty plans in water-colour for the Emergency Hospital and the building which was to contain the night-schools, library and gymnasium; but even these minor projects—which he had urged her to take up as a means of learning their essential dependence on his larger scheme—were soon to be set aside by obstacles of a material order. Bessy always wanted money—not a great deal, but, as she reasonably put it, “enough”—and who was to blame if her father and Mr. Tredegar, each in his different capacity, felt obliged to point out that every philanthropic outlay at Westmore must entail a corresponding reduction in her income? Perhaps if she could have been oftener at Hanaford these arguments would have been counteracted, for she was tender-hearted, and prompt to relieve such suffering as she saw about her; but her imagination was not active, and it was easy for her to forget painful sights when they were not under her eye. This was perhaps—half-consciously—one of the reasons why she avoided Hanaford; why, as Amherst exclaimed, they had been everywhere since their marriage but to the place where their obligations called them. There had, at any rate, always been some good excuse for not returning there, and consequently for postponing the work of improvement which, it was generally felt, her husband could not fitly begin till she *had* returned and gone over the ground with him. After their marriage, and especially in view of the comment excited by that romantic incident, it was impossible not to yield to her

wish that they should go abroad for a few months; then, before her confinement, the doctors had exacted that she should be spared all fatigue and worry; and after the baby's death Amherst had felt with her too tenderly to venture an immediate return to unwelcome questions.

For by this time it had become clear to him that such questions were, and always would be, unwelcome to her. As the easiest means of escaping them, she had once more dismissed the whole problem to the vague and tiresome sphere of "business," whence he had succeeded in detaching it for a moment in the early days of their union. Her first husband—poor unappreciated Westmore!—had always spared her the boredom of "business," and Halford Gaines and Mr. Tredegar were ready to show her the same consideration; it was part of the modern code of chivalry that lovely woman should not be bothered about ways and means. But Bessy was too much the wife—and the wife in love—to consent that her husband's views on the management of the mills should be totally disregarded. Precisely because her advisers looked unfavourably on his intervention, she felt bound—if only in defence of her illusions—to maintain and emphasise it. The mills were, in fact, the official "platform" on which she had married: Amherst's devoted *rôle* at Westmore had justified the unconventionality of the step. And so she was committed—the more helplessly for her dense misintelligence of both sides of the question—to the policy of conciliating the opposing influences which had so uncomfortably chosen to fight out their case on the field of her poor little existence: theoretically siding with her

husband, but surreptitiously, as he well knew, giving aid and comfort to the enemy, who were really defending her own cause.

All this Amherst saw with that cruel insight which had replaced his former blindness. He was, in truth, more ashamed of the insight than of the blindness: it seemed to him horribly cold-blooded to be thus analysing, after two years of marriage, the source of his wife's inconsistencies. And, partly for this reason, he had put off from month to month the final question of the future management of the mills, and of the radical changes to be made there if his system were to prevail. But the time had come when, if Bessy had to turn to Westmore for the justification of her marriage, he had even more need of calling upon it for the same service. He had not, assuredly, married her because of Westmore; but he would scarcely have contemplated marriage with a rich woman unless the source of her wealth had offered him some such opportunity as Westmore presented. His special training, and the natural bent of his mind, qualified him, in what had once seemed a predestined manner, to help Bessy to use her power nobly, for her own uplifting as well as for that of Westmore; and so the mills became, incongruously enough, the plank of safety to which both clung in their sense of impending disaster.

It was not that Amherst feared the temptation to idleness if this outlet for his activity were cut off. He had long since found that the luxury with which his wife surrounded him merely quickened his natural bent for hard work and hard fare. He recalled with a touch of bitterness how he had once regretted having separ-

ated himself from his mother's class, and how seductive for a moment, to both mind and senses, that other life had appeared. Well—he knew it now, and it had neither charm nor peril for him. Capua must have been a dull place to one who had once drunk the joy of battle. What he dreaded was not that he should learn to love the life of ease, but that he should grow to loathe it uncontrollably, as the symbol of his mental and spiritual bondage. And Westmore was his safety-valve, his refuge—if he were cut off from Westmore what remained to him? It was not only the work he had found to his hand, but the one work for which his hand was fitted. It was his life that he was fighting for in insisting that now at last, before the close of this long-deferred visit to Hanaford, the question of the mills should be faced and settled. He had made that clear to Bessy, in a scene he still shrank from recalling; for it was of the essence of his somewhat unbending integrity that he would not trick her into a confused surrender to the personal influence he still possessed over her, but must seek to convince her by the tedious process of argument and exposition, against which she knew no defence but tears and petulance. But he had, at any rate, gained her consent to his setting forth his views at the meeting of directors the next morning; and meanwhile he had meant to be extraordinarily patient and reasonable with her, till the hint of Mrs. Ansell's stratagem produced in him a fresh reaction of distrust.

XII.

THAT evening when dinner ended, Mrs. Ansell, with a glance through the tall dining-room windows, had suggested to Bessy that it would be pleasanter to take coffee on the verandah; but Amherst detained his wife with a glance.

“I should like Bessy to stay,” he said.

The dining-room being on the cool side of the house, with a refreshing outlook on the garden, the men preferred to smoke there rather than in the stuffily-draped Oriental apartment destined to such rites; and Bessy Amherst, with a faint sigh, sank back into her seat, while Mrs. Ansell drifted out through one of the open windows.

The men surrounding Richard Westmore's table were the same who nearly three years earlier had gathered in his house for the same purpose: the discussion of conditions at the mills. The only perceptible change in the relation to each other of the persons composing this group was that John Amherst was now the host of the other two, instead of being a subordinate called in for cross-examination; but he was so indifferent, or at least so heedless, a host—so forgetful, for instance, of Mr. Tredegar's preference for a “light” cigar, and of Mr. Langhope's feelings on the duty of making the Westmore madeira circulate with the sun—that the

change was manifest only in his evening-dress, and in the fact of his sitting at the foot of the table.

If Amherst was conscious of the contrast thus implied, it was only as a restriction on his freedom. As far as the welfare of Westmore was concerned he would rather have stood before his companions as the assistant manager of the mills than as the husband of their owner; and it seemed to him, as he looked back, that he had done very little with the opportunity which looked so great in the light of his present restrictions. What he *had* done with it—the use to which, as unfriendly critics might insinuate, he had so adroitly put it—had landed him, ironically enough, in the ugly *impasse* of a situation from which no issue seemed possible without some wasteful sacrifice of feeling.

His wife's feelings, for example, were already revealing themselves in an impatient play of her fan that made her father presently lean forward to suggest: "If we men are to talk shop, is it necessary to keep Bessy in this hot room?"

Amherst rose and opened the window behind his wife's chair.

"There's a breeze from the west—the room will be cooler now," he said, returning to his seat.

"Oh, I don't mind—" Bessy murmured, in a tone intended to give her companions the full measure of what she was being called on to endure.

Mr. Tredegar coughed slightly. "May I trouble you for that other box of cigars, Amherst? No, *not* the Cabañas." Bessy rose and handed him the box on which his glance significantly rested. "Ah, thank you, *my dear*. I was about to ask," he continued, looking

about for the cigar-lighter, which flamed unheeded at Amherst's elbow, "what special purpose will be served by a preliminary review of the questions to be discussed to-morrow."

"Ah—exactly," murmured Mr. Langhope. "The madeira, my dear John? No—ah—*please*—to the left!"

Amherst impatiently reversed the direction in which he had set the precious vessel moving, and turned to Mr. Tredegar, who was conspicuously lighting his cigar with a match extracted from his waist-coat pocket.

"The purpose is to define my position in the matter; and I prefer that Bessy should do this with your help rather than with mine."

Mr. Tredegar surveyed his cigar through drooping lids, as though the question propounded by Amherst were perched on its tip.

"Is not your position naturally involved in and defined by hers? You will excuse my saying that—technically speaking, of course—I cannot distinctly conceive of it as having any separate existence."

Mr. Tredegar spoke with the deliberate mildness that was regarded as his most effective weapon at the bar, since it was likely to abash those who were too intelligent to be propitiated by it.

"Certainly it is involved in hers," Amherst agreed; "but how far that defines it is just what I have waited till now to find out."

Bessy at this point recalled her presence by a restless turn of her graceful person, and her father, with an affectionate glance at her, interposed amicably: "But surely—according to old-fashioned ideas—it implies identity of interests?"

"Yes; but whose interests?" Amherst asked.

"Why—your wife's, man! She owns the mills."

Amherst hesitated. "I would rather talk of my wife's interest in the mills than of her interests there; but we'll keep to the plural if you prefer it. Personally, I believe the terms should be interchangeable in the conduct of such a business."

"Ah—I'm glad to hear that," said Mr. Tredegar quickly, "since it's precisely the view we all take."

Amherst's colour rose. "Definitions are ambiguous," he said. "Before you adopt mine, perhaps I had better develop it a little further. What I mean is, that Bessy's interests in Westmore should be regulated by her interest in it—in its welfare as a social body, aside from its success as a commercial enterprise. If we agree on this definition, we are at one as to the other: namely that my relation to the matter is defined by hers."

He paused a moment, as if to give his wife time to contribute some sign of assent and encouragement; but she maintained a puzzled silence and he went on: "There is nothing new in this. I have tried to make Bessy understand from the beginning what obligations I thought the ownership of Westmore entailed, and how I hoped to help her fulfill them; but ever since our marriage all definite discussion of the subject has been put off for one cause or another, and that is my reason for urging that it should be brought up at the directors' meeting to-morrow."

There was another pause, during which Bessy glanced tentatively at Mr. Tredegar, and then said, with a lovely rise of colour: "But, John, I sometimes think you forget how much has been done at Westmore—the Mothers'

Club, and the play-ground, and all—in the way of carrying out your ideas.”

Mr. Tredegar discreetly dropped his glance to his cigar, and Mr. Langhope sounded an irrepressible note of approval and encouragement.

Amherst smiled. “No, I have not forgotten; and I am grateful to you for giving my ideas a trial. But what has been done hitherto is purely superficial.” Bessy’s eyes clouded, and he added hastily: “Don’t think I undervalue it for that reason—heaven knows the surface of life needs improving! But it’s like picking flowers and sticking them in the ground to make a garden—unless you transplant the flower with its roots, and prepare the soil to receive it, your garden will be faded to-morrow. No radical changes have yet been made at Westmore; and it is of radical changes that I want to speak.”

Bessy’s look grew more pained, and Mr. Langhope exclaimed with unwonted irascibility: “Upon my soul, Amherst, the tone you take about what your wife has done doesn’t strike me as the likeliest way of encouraging her to do more!”

“I don’t want to encourage her to do more on such a basis—the sooner she sees the futility of it the better for Westmore!”

“The futility—?” Bessy broke out, with a flutter of tears in her voice; but before her father could intervene Mr. Tredegar had raised his hand with the gesture of one accustomed to wield the gavel.

“My dear child, I see Amherst’s point, and it is best, as he says, that you should see it too. What he desires, as I understand it, is the complete reconstruction of the

present state of things at Westmore; and he is right in saying that all your good works there—night-schools, and nursery, and so forth—leave that issue untouched."

A smile quivered under Mr. Langhope's moustache. He and Amherst both knew that Mr. Tredegar's feint of recognising the justice of his adversary's claim was merely the first step to annihilating it; but Bessy could never be made to understand this, and always felt herself deserted and betrayed when any side but her own was given a hearing.

"I'm sorry if all I have tried to do at Westmore is useless—but I suppose I shall never understand business," she murmured, vainly seeking consolation in her father's eye.

"This is not business," Amherst broke in. "It's the question of your personal relation to the people there—the last thing that business considers."

Mr. Langhope uttered an impatient exclamation. "I wish to heaven the owner of the mills had made it clear just what that relation was to be!"

"I think he did, sir," Amherst answered steadily, "in leaving his wife the unrestricted control of the property."

He had reddened under Mr. Langhope's thrust, but his voice betrayed no irritation, and Bessy rewarded him with an unexpected beam of sympathy: she was always up in arms at the least sign of his being treated as an intruder.

"I am sure, papa," she said, a little tremulously, "that poor Richard, though he knew I was not clever, felt he could trust me to take the best advice——"

"Ah, that's all we ask of you, my child!" her father

sighed, while Mr. Tredegar drily interposed: "We are merely losing time by this digression. Let me suggest that Amherst should give us an idea of the changes he wishes to make at Westmore."

Amherst, as he turned to answer, remembered with what ardent faith in his powers of persuasion he had responded to the same appeal three years earlier. He had thought then that all his cause needed was a hearing; now he knew that the practical man's readiness to let the idealist talk corresponds with the busy parent's permission to destructive infancy to "run out and play." They would let him state his case to the four corners of the earth—if only he did not expect them to act on it! It was their policy to let him exhaust himself in argument and exhortation, to listen to him so politely and patiently that if he failed to enforce his ideas it should not be for lack of opportunity to expound them. . . . And the alternative struck him as hardly less to be feared. Supposing that the incredible happened, that his reasons prevailed with his wife, and, through her, with the others—at what cost would the victory be won? Would Bessy ever forgive him for winning it? And what would his situation be, if it left him in control of Westmore but estranged from his wife?

He recalled suddenly a phrase he had used that afternoon to the dark-eyed girl at the garden-party: "What risks we run when we scramble into the chariot of the gods!" And at the same instant he heard her retort, and saw her fine gesture of defiance. How could he ever have doubted that the thing was worth doing at whatever cost? Something in him—some secret lurking element of weakness and evasion—shrank out of

sight in the light of her question: "Do *you* act on that?" and the "God forbid!" he had instantly flashed back to her. He turned to Mr. Tredegar with his answer.

Amherst knew that any large theoretical exposition of the case would be as much wasted on the two men as on his wife. To gain his point he must take only one step at a time, and it seemed to him that the first thing needed at Westmore was that the hands should work and live under healthier conditions. To attain this, two important changes were necessary: the floor-space of the mills must be enlarged, and the company must cease to rent out tenements, and give the operatives the opportunity to buy land for themselves. Both these changes involved the upheaval of the existing order. Whenever the Westmore mills had been enlarged, it had been for the sole purpose of increasing the revenues of the company; and now Amherst asked that these revenues should be materially and permanently reduced. As to the suppression of the company tenement, such a measure struck at the roots of the baneful paternalism which was choking out every germ of initiative in the workman. Once the operatives had room to work in, and the hope of homes of their own to go to when work was over, Amherst was willing to trust to time for the satisfaction of their other needs. He believed that a sounder understanding of these needs would develop on both sides the moment the employers proved their good faith by the deliberate and permanent sacrifice of excessive gain to the well-being of the employed; and once the two had learned to regard each other not as antagonists but as collaborators, a long

step would have been taken toward a readjustment of the whole industrial relation. In regard to general and distant results, Amherst tried not to be too sanguine, even in his own thoughts. His aim was to remedy the abuse nearest at hand, in the hope of thus getting gradually closer to the central evil; and, had his action been unhampered, he would still have preferred the longer and more circuitous path of practical experiment to the sweeping adoption of a new industrial system.

But his demands, moderate as they were, assumed in his hearers the consciousness of a moral claim superior to the obligation of making one's business "pay;" and it was the futility of this assumption that chilled the arguments on his lips, since in the orthodox creed of the business world it was a weakness and not a strength to be content with five per cent where ten was obtainable. Business was one thing, philanthropy another; and the enthusiasts who tried combining them were usually reduced, after a brief flight, to paying fifty cents on the dollar, and handing over their stock to a promoter presumably unhampered by humanitarian ideals.

Amherst knew that this was the answer with which his plea would be met; knew, moreover, that the plea was given a hearing simply because his judges deemed it so pitiably easy to refute. But the knowledge, once he had begun to speak, fanned his argument to a white heat of pleading, since, with failure so plainly ahead, small concessions and compromises were not worth making. Reason would be wasted on all; but eloquence might at least prevail with Bessy. . . .

When, late that night, he went upstairs after long

pacings of the garden, he was surprised to see a light in her room. She was not given to midnight study, and fearing that she might be ill he knocked at her door. There was no answer, and after a short pause he turned the handle and entered.

In the great canopied Westmore couch, her arms flung upward and her hands clasped beneath her head, she lay staring fretfully at the globe of electric light which hung from the centre of the embossed and gilded ceiling. Seen thus, with the soft curves of throat and arms revealed, and her face childishly set in a cloud of loosened hair, she looked no older than Cicely—and, like Cicely, inaccessible to grown-up arguments and the stronger logic of experience.

It was a trick of hers, in such moods, to ignore any attempt to attract her notice; and Amherst was prepared for her remaining motionless as he paused on the threshold and then advanced toward the middle of the room. There had been a time when he would have been exasperated by her pretence of not seeing him, but a deep weariness of spirit now dulled him to these surface pricks.

"I was afraid you were not well when I saw the light burning," he began.

"Thank you—I am quite well," she answered in a colourless voice, without turning her head.

"Shall I put it out, then? You can't sleep with such a glare in your eyes."

"I should not sleep at any rate; and I hate to lie awake in the dark."

"Why shouldn't you sleep?" He moved nearer,

looking down compassionately on her perturbed face and struggling lips.

She lay silent a moment; then she faltered out: "B—because I'm so unhappy!"

The pretence of indifference was swept away by a gush of childish sobs as she flung over on her side and buried her face in the embroidered pillows.

Amherst, bending down, laid a quieting hand on her shoulder. "Bessy——"

She sobbed on.

He seated himself silently in the armchair beside the bed, and kept his soothing hold on her shoulder. The time had come when he went through all these accustomed acts of pacification as mechanically as a nurse soothing a fretful child. And once he had thought her weeping eloquent! He looked about him at the spacious room, with its heavy hangings of damask and the thick velvet carpet which stifled his steps. Everywhere were the graceful tokens of her presence—the vast lace-draped toilet-table strewn with silver and crystal, the embroidered muslin cushions heaped on the lounge, the little rose-lined slippers she had just put off, the lace wrapper, with a scent of violets in its folds, which he had pushed aside when he sat down beside her; and he remembered how full of a mysterious and intimate charm these things had once appeared to him. It was characteristic that the remembrance made him more patient with her now. Perhaps, after all, it was his failure that she was crying over. . . .

"Don't be unhappy. You decided as seemed best to you," he said.

She pressed her handkerchief against her lips, still

keeping her head averted. "But I hate all these arguments and disputes. Why should you unsettle everything?" she murmured.

His mother's words! Involuntarily he removed his hand from her shoulder, though he still remained seated by the bed.

"You are right. I see the uselessness of it," he assented, with an uncontrollable note of irony.

She turned her head at the tone, and fixed her plaintive brimming eyes on him. "You *are* angry with me!"

"Was that troubling you?" He leaned forward again, with compassion in his face. *Sancta simplicitas!* was the thought within him.

"I am not angry," he went on; "be reasonable and try to sleep."

She started upright, the light masses of her hair floating about her like silken sea-weed lifted on an invisible tide. "Don't talk like that! I can't endure to be humoured like a baby. I am unhappy because I can't see why all these wretched questions should be dragged into our life. I hate to have you always disagreeing with Mr. Tredegar, who is so clever and has so much experience; and yet I hate to see you give way to him, because that makes it appear as if . . . as if . . ."

"He didn't care a straw for my ideas?" Amherst smiled. "Well, he doesn't—and I never dreamed of making him. So don't worry about that either."

"You never dreamed of making him care for your ideas? But then why do you——"

"Why do I go on setting them forth at such great

length?" Amherst smiled again. "To convince you—that's my only ambition."

She stared at him, shaking her head back to toss a loose lock from her puzzled eyes. A tear still shone on her lashes, but with the motion it fell and trembled down her cheek.

• "To convince *me*? But you know I am so ignorant of such things."

"Most women are."

"I never pretended to understand anything about—economics, or whatever you call it."

"No."

"Then how——"

He turned and looked at her gently. "I thought you might have begun to understand something about *me*."

"About you?" The colour flowered softly under her clear skin.

"About what my ideas on such subjects were likely to be worth—judging from what you know of me in other respects." He paused and glanced away from her. "Well," he concluded deliberately, "I suppose I've had my answer to-night."

"Oh, John——!"

He rose and wandered across the room, pausing a moment to finger absently the trinkets on the dressing-table. The act recalled with a curious vividness certain dulled sensations of their first days together, when to handle and examine these frail little accessories of her toilet had been part of the wonder and amusement of his new existence. He could still hear her laugh as she leaned over him, watching his mystified look in the glass, till their reflected eyes met there and drew down

her lips to his. He laid down the fragrant powder-puff he had been turning slowly between his fingers, and moved back toward the bed. In the interval he had reached a decision.

"Well—isn't it natural that I should think so?" he began again, as he stood beside her. "When we married I never expected you to care or know much about economics. It isn't a quality a man usually chooses his wife for. But I had a fancy—perhaps it shows my conceit—that when we had lived together a year or two, and you'd found out what kind of a fellow I was in other ways—ways any woman can judge of—I had a fancy that you might take my opinions on faith when it came to my own special business—the thing I'm generally supposed to know about."

He knew that he was touching a sensitive chord, for Bessy had to the full her sex's pride of possessorship. He was human and faulty till others criticised him—then he became a god. But in this case a conflicting influence restrained her from complete response to his appeal.

"I *do* feel sure you know—about the treatment of the hands and all that; but you said yourself once—the first time we ever talked about Westmore—that the business part was different——"

Here it was again, the ancient ineradicable belief in the separable body and soul! Even an industrial organisation was supposed to be subject to the old theological distinction, and Bessy was ready to co-operate with her husband in the emancipation of Westmore's spiritual part if only its body remained under the law.

Amherst controlled his impatience, as it was always

easy for him to do when he had fixed on a definite line of conduct.

"It was my situation that was different; not what you call the business part. That is inextricably bound up with the treatment of the hands. If I am to have anything to do with the mills now I can deal with them only as your representative; and as such I am bound to take in the whole question."

Bessy's face clouded: was he going into it all again? But he read her look and went on reassuringly: "That was what I meant by saying that I hoped you would take me on faith. If I want the welfare of Westmore it's above all, I believe, because I want Westmore to see you as *I* do—as the dispenser of happiness, who could not endure to benefit by any wrong or injustice to others."

"Of course, of course I don't want to do them injustice!"

"Well, then——"

He had seated himself beside her again, clasping in his the hand with which she was fretting the lace-edged sheet. He felt her restless fingers surrender slowly, and her eyes turned to him in appeal.

"But I care for what people say of you too! And you know—it's horrid, but one must consider it—if they say you're spending my money imprudently . . ." The blood rose to her neck and face. "I don't mind for myself . . . even if I have to give up as many things as papa and Mr. Tredegar think . . . but there is Cicely . . . and if people said . . ."

"If people said I was spending Cicely's money on improving the condition of the people to whose work she

will some day owe all her wealth—" Amherst paused: "Well, I would rather hear that said of me than any other thing I can think of, except one."

"Except what?"

"That I was doing it with her mother's help and approval."

She drew a long tremulous sigh: he knew it was always a relief to her to have him assert himself strongly. But a residue of resistance still clouded her mind.

"I should always want to help you, of course; but if Mr. Tredegar and Halford Gaines think your plan un-businesslike——"

"Mr. Tredegar and Halford Gaines are certain to think it so. And that is why I said, just now, that it comes, in the end, to your choosing between us; taking them on experience or taking me on faith."

She looked at him wistfully. "Of course I should expect to give up things. . . . You wouldn't want me to live here?"

"I should not ask you to," he said, half-smiling.

"I suppose there would be a good many things we couldn't do——"

"You would certainly have less money for a number of years; after that, I believe you would have more rather than less; but I should not want you to think that, beyond a reasonable point, the prosperity of the mills was ever to be measured by your dividends."

"No." She leaned back wearily among the pillows. "I suppose, for instance, we should have to give up Europe this summer——"

Here at last was the bottom of her thought! It was

always on the immediate pleasure that her soul hung: she had not enough imagination to look beyond, even in the projecting of her own desires. And it was on his knowledge of this limitation that Amherst had deliberately built.

"I don't see how you could go to Europe," he said.

"The doctor thinks I need it," she faltered.

"In that case, of course—" He stood up, not abruptly, or with any show of irritation, but as if accepting this as her final answer. "What you need most, in the meantime, is a little sleep," he said. "I will tell your maid not to disturb you in the morning." He had returned to his soothing way of speech, as though definitely resigned to the inutility of further argument. "And I will say good-bye now," he continued, "because I shall probably take an early train, before you wake——"

She sat up with a start. "An early train? Why, where are you going?"

"I must go to Chicago some time this month, and as I shall not be wanted here to-morrow I might as well run out there at once, and join you next week at Lynbrook."

Bessy had grown pale. "But I don't understand——"

Their eyes met. "Can't you understand that I am human enough to prefer, under the circumstances, not being present at to-morrow's meeting?" he said with a dry laugh.

She sank back with a moan of discouragement, turning her face away as he began to move toward his
room

"Shall I put the light out?" he asked, pausing with his hand on the electric button.

"Yes, please."

He pushed in the button and walked on, guided through the obscurity by the line of light under his door. As he reached the threshold he heard a little choking cry.

"John—oh, John!"

He paused.

"I can't *bear* it!" The sobs increased.

"Bear what?"

"That you should hate me——"

"Don't be foolish," he said, groping for his door-handle.

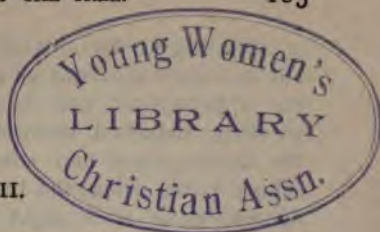
"But you do hate me—and I deserve it!"

"Nonsense, dear. Try to sleep."

"I can't sleep till you've forgiven me. Say you don't hate me! I'll do anything . . . only say you don't hate me!"

He stood still a moment, thinking; then he turned back, and made his way across the room to her side. As he sat down beside her, he felt her arms reach for his neck and her wet face press itself against his cheek.

"I'll do anything . . ." she sobbed; and in the darkness he held her to him and hated his victory.



XIII.

MRS. ANSELL was engaged in what she called picking up threads. She had been abroad for the summer—had, in fact, transferred herself but a few hours earlier from her returning steamer to the little station at Lynbrook—and was now, in the bright September afternoon, which left her in sole possession of the terrace of Lynbrook House, using that pleasant eminence as a point of observation from which to gather up some of the loose ends of history dropped at her departure.

It might have been thought that the actual scene outspread below her—the descending gardens, the tennis-courts, the farm-lands sloping away to the blue sea-like shimmer of the Hempstead plains—offered, at the moment, little material for her purpose; but that was to view them with a superficial eye. Mrs. Ansell's trained gaze was, for example, greatly enlightened by the fact that the tennis-courts were fringed by a group of people indolently watchful of the figures agitating themselves about the nets; and that, as she turned her head toward the entrance avenue, the receding view of a station omnibus, followed by a luggage-cart, announced that more guests were to be added to those who had almost taxed to its limits the expansibility of the luncheon-table.

All this, to the initiated eye, was full of suggestion; but its significance was as nothing to that presented by the approach of two figures which, as Mrs. Ansell watched, detached themselves from the cluster about the tennis-ground and struck, obliquely and at a desultory pace, across the lawn toward the terrace. The figures—those of a slight young man with stooping shoulders, and of a lady equally youthful but slenderly erect—moved forward in absorbed communion, as if unconscious of their surroundings and indefinite as to their direction, till, on the brink of the wide grass terrace just below their observer's parapet, they paused a moment and faced each other in closer speech. This interchange of words, though brief in measure of time, lasted long enough to add a vivid strand to Mrs. Ansell's thickening skein; then, on a gesture of the lady's, and without signs of formal leave-taking, the young man struck into a path which regained the entrance avenue, while his companion, quickening her pace, crossed the grass terrace and mounted the wide stone steps sweeping up to the house.

These brought her out on the upper terrace a few yards from Mrs. Ansell's post, and exposed her, unprepared, to the full beam of welcome which that lady's rapid advance threw like a searchlight across her path.

"Dear Miss Brent! I was just wondering how it was that I hadn't seen you before." Mrs. Ansell, as she spoke, drew the girl's hand into a long soft clasp which served to keep them confronted while she delicately groped for whatever thread the encounter seemed to proffer.

Justine made no attempt to evade the scrutiny to

which she found herself exposed; she merely released her hand by a movement instinctively evasive of the mechanical endearment, explaining, with a smile that softened the gesture: "I was out with Cicely when you arrived. We've just come in."

"The dear child! I haven't seen her either." Mrs. Ansell continued to bestow upon the speaker's clear dark face an intensity of attention in which, for the moment, Cicely had no perceptible share. "I hear you are teaching her botany, and all kinds of wonderful things."

Justine smiled again. "I am trying to teach her to wonder: that is the hardest faculty to cultivate in the modern child."

"Yes—I suppose so; in myself," Mrs. Ansell admitted with a responsive brightness, "I find it develops with age. The world is a remarkable place." She threw this off absently, as though leaving Miss Brent to apply it either to the inorganic phenomena with which Cicely was supposed to be occupied, or to those subtler manifestations that engaged her own attention.

"It's a great thing," she continued, "for Bessy to have had your help—for Cicely, and for herself too. There is so much that I want you to tell me about her. As an old friend I want the benefit of your fresher eye."

"About Bessy?" Justine hesitated, letting her glance drift to the distant group still anchored about the tennis-nets. "Don't you find her looking better?"

"Than when I left? So much so that I was unduly disturbed, just now, by seeing that clever little doctor—it *was* he, wasn't it, who came up the lawn with you?"

"Dr. Wyant? Yes." Miss Brent hesitated again. "But he merely called—with a message."

"Not professionally? *Tant mieux!* The truth is, I was anxious about Bessy when I left—I thought she ought to have gone abroad for a change. But, as it turns out, her little excursion with you did as well."

"I think she only needed rest. Perhaps her six weeks in the Adirondacks were better than Europe."

"Ah, under *your* care—that made them better!" Mrs. Ansell in turn hesitated, the lines of her face melting and changing as if a rapid stage-hand had shifted them. When she spoke again they were as open as a public square, but also as destitute of personal significance, as flat and smooth as the painted drop before the real scene it hides.

"I have always thought that Bessy, for all her health and activity, needs as much care as Cicely—the kind of care a clever friend can give. She is so wasteful of her strength and her nerves, and so unwilling to listen to reason. Poor Dick Westmore watched over her as if she were a baby; but perhaps Mr. Amherst, who must have been used to such a different type of woman, doesn't realise. . . and then he's so little here. . ." The drop was lit up by a smile that seemed to make it more impenetrable. "As an old friend I can't help telling you how much I hope she is to have you with her for a long time—a long, long time."

Miss Brent bent her head in slight acknowledgment of the tribute. "Oh, soon she will not need any care——"

"My dear Miss Brent, she will always need it!" Mrs. Ansell made a movement inviting the young girl to

share the bench from which, at the latter's approach, she had risen. "But perhaps there is not enough in such a life to satisfy your professional energies."

She seated herself, and after an imperceptible pause Justine sank into the seat beside her. "I am very glad, just now, to give my energies a holiday," she said, leaning back with a little sigh of retrospective weariness.

"You are tired too? Bessy wrote me you had been quite used up by a trying case after we saw you at Hanaford."

Miss Brent smiled. "When a nurse is fit for work she calls a trying case a 'beautiful' one."

"But meanwhile—?" Mrs. Ansell shone on her with elder-sisterly solicitude. "Meanwhile, why not stay on with Cicely—above all, with Bessy? Surely she's a 'beautiful' case too."

"Isn't she?" Justine laughingly agreed.

"And if you want to be tried—" Mrs. Ansell swept the scene with a slight lift of her philosophic shoulders—"you'll find there are trials enough everywhere."

Her companion started up with a glance at the small watch on her breast. "One of them is that it's already after four, and that I must see that tea is sent down to the tennis-ground, and the new arrivals looked after."

"I saw the omnibus on its way to the station. Are many more people coming?"

"Five or six, I believe. The house is usually full for Sunday."

Mrs. Ansell made a slight motion to detain her. "And when is Mr. Amherst expected?"

Miss Brent's pale cheek seemed to take on a darker tone of ivory, and her glance dropped from her com-

panion's face to the vivid stretch of gardens at their feet. "Bessy has not told me," she said.

"Ah—" the older woman rejoined, looking also toward the gardens, as if to intercept Miss Brent's glance in its flight. The latter stood still a moment, with the appearance of not wishing to evade whatever else her companion might have to say; then she moved away, entering the house by one window just as Mr. Langhope emerged from it by another.

The sound of his stick tapping across the bricks roused Mrs. Ansell from her musings, but she showed her sense of his presence simply by returning to the bench she had just left; and accepting this mute invitation, Mr. Langhope crossed the terrace and seated himself at her side.

When he had done so they continued to look at each other without speaking, after the manner of old friends possessed of occult means of communication; and as the result of this inward colloquy Mr. Langhope at length said: "Well, what do you make of it?"

"What do *you*?" she rejoined, turning full upon him a face so released from its usual defences and disguises that it looked at once older and more simple than the countenance she presented to the world.

Mr. Langhope waved a deprecating hand. "I want your fresher impressions."

"That's what I just now said to Miss Brent."

"You've been talking to Miss Brent?"

"Only a flying word—she had to go and look after the new arrivals."

Mr. Langhope's attention deepened. "Well, what did you say to her?"

"Wouldn't you rather hear what she said to *me*?"

He smiled. "A good cross-examiner always gets the answers he wants. Let me hear your side, and I shall know hers."

"I should say that applied only to stupid cross-examiners; or to those who have stupid subjects to deal with. And Miss Brent is not stupid, you know."

"Far from it! What else do you make out?"

"I make out that she's in possession."

"Here?"

"Don't look startled. Do you dislike her?"

"Heaven forbid—with those eyes! She has a wit of her own, too—and she certainly makes things easier for Bessy."

"She guards her carefully, at any rate. I could find out nothing."

"About Bessy?"

"About the general situation."

"Including Miss Brent?"

Mrs. Ansell smiled faintly. "I made one little discovery about her."

"Well?"

"She's intimate with the new doctor."

"Wyant?" Mr. Langhope's interest dropped. "What of that? I believe she knew him before."

"I daresay. It's of no special importance, except as giving us a possible clue to her character. She strikes me as interesting and mysterious."

Mr. Langhope smiled. "The things your imagination does for you!"

"It helps me to see that we may find Miss Brent useful as a friend."

"A friend?"

"An ally." She paused, as if searching for a word. "She may restore the equilibrium."

Mr. Langhope's handsome face darkened. "Open Bessy's eyes to Amherst? Damn him!" he said quietly.

Mrs. Ansell let the imprecation pass. "When was he last here?" she asked.

"Five or six weeks ago—for one night. His only visit since she came back from the Adirondacks."

"What do you think his motive is? He must know what he risks in losing his hold on Bessy."

"His motive? With your eye for them, can you ask? A devouring ambition, that's all! Haven't you noticed that, in all except the biggest minds, ambition takes the form of wanting to command where one has had to obey? Amherst has been made to toe the line at Westmore, and now he wants Truscomb—yes, and Halford Gaines, too!—to do the same. That's the secret of his servant-of-the-people pose—gad, I believe it's the whole secret of his marriage! He's devouring my daughter's substance to pay off an old score against the mills. He'll never rest till he has Truscomb out, and some creature of his own in command—and then, *vogue la galère!* If it were women, now," Mr. Langhope summed up impatiently, "one could understand it, at his age, and with that damned romantic head—but to be put aside for a lot of low mongrelly socialist mill-hands—ah, my poor girl—my poor girl!"

Mrs. Ansell mused. "You didn't write me that things were so bad. There's been no actual quarrel?" she asked.

"How can there be, when the poor child does all he wants? He's simply too busy to come and thank her!"

"Too busy at Hanaford?"

"So he says. Introducing the golden age at Westmore—it's likely to be the age of copper at Lynbrook."

Mrs. Ansell drew a meditative breath. "I was thinking of that. I understood that Bessy would have to retrench while the changes at Westmore were going on."

"Well—didn't she give up Europe, and cable over to countermand her new motor?"

"But the life here! This mob of people! Miss Brent tells me the house is full for every week-end."

"Would you have my daughter cut off from all her friends?"

Mrs. Ansell met this promptly. "From some of the new ones, at any rate! Have you heard who has just arrived?"

Mr. Langhope's hesitation showed a tinge of embarrassment. "I'm not sure—someone has always just arrived."

"Well, the Fenton Carburys, then!" Mrs. Ansell left it to her tone to annotate the announcement.

Mr. Langhope raised his eyebrows slightly. "Are they likely to be an exceptionally costly pleasure?"

"If you're trying to prove that I haven't kept to the point—I can assure you that I'm well within it!"

"But since the good Blanche has got her divorce and married Carbury, wherein do they differ from other week-end automata?"

"Because most divorced women marry again to be respectable."

Mr. Langhope smiled faintly. "Yes—that's their punishment. But it would be too dull for Blanche."

"Precisely. *She* married again to see Ned Bowfort!"

"Ah—that may yet be hers!"

Mrs. Ansell sighed at his perversity. "Meanwhile, she's brought him here, and it is unnatural to see Bessy lending herself to such combinations."

"You're corrupted by a glimpse of the old societies. Here Bowfort and Carbury are simply hands at bridge."

"Old hands at it—yes! And the bridge is another point: Bessy never used to play for money."

"Well, she may make something, and offset her husband's prodigalities."

"There again—with this *train de vie*, how on earth are both ends to meet?"

Mr. Langhope grown suddenly grave, struck his cane resoundingly on the terrace. "Westmore and Lynbrook? I don't want them to—I want them to get farther and farther apart!"

She cast on him a look of startled divination. "You want Bessy to go on spending too much money?"

"How can I help it if it costs?"

"If what costs—?" She stopped, her eyes still wide; then their glances crossed, and she exclaimed: "If your scheme costs? It *is* your scheme, then?"

He shrugged his shoulders again. "It's a passive attitude——"

"Ah, the deepest plans are that!" Mr. Langhope uttered no protest, and she continued to piece her conjectures together. "But you expect it to lead up to something active. Do you want a rupture?"

"I want him brought back to his senses."

"Do you think that will bring him back to *her*?"

"Where the devil else will he have to go?"

Mrs. Ansell's eyes dropped toward the gardens, across which desultory knots of people were straggling back from the ended tennis-match. "Ah, here they all come," she said, rising with a half-sigh; and as she stood watching the advance of the brightly-tinted groups she added slowly: "It's ingenious—but you don't understand him."

Mr. Langhope stroked his moustache. "Perhaps not," he assented thoughtfully. "But suppose we go in before they join us? I want to show you a set of Ming I picked up the other day for Bessy. I flatter myself I *do* understand Ming."

XIV.

JUSTINE BRENT, her household duties discharged, had gone upstairs to her room, a little turret chamber projecting above the wide terrace below, from which the sounds of lively intercourse now rose increasingly to her window.

Bessy, she knew, would have preferred to have her remain with the party from whom these evidences of gaiety proceeded. Mrs. Amherst had grown to depend on her friend's nearness. She liked to feel that Justine's quick hand and eye were always in waiting on her impulses, prompt to interpret and execute them without any exertion of her own. Bessy combined great zeal in the pursuit of sport—a tireless passion for the saddle, the golf-course, the tennis-court—with an almost oriental inertia within doors, an indolence of body and brain that made her shrink from the active obligations of hospitality, though she had grown to depend more and more on the distractions of a crowded house.

But Justine, though grateful, and anxious to show her gratitude, was unwilling to add to her other duties that of joining in the amusements of the house-party. She made no pretence of effacing herself when she thought her presence might be useful—but, even if she had cared for the diversions in favour at Lynbrook, a certain unavowed pride would have kept her from par-

ticipating in them on the same footing with Bessy's guests. She was not in the least ashamed of her position in the household, but she chose that everyone else should be aware of it, that she should not for an instant be taken for one of the nomadic damsels who form the camp-followers of the great army of pleasure. Yet even on this point her sensitiveness was not exaggerated. Adversity has a deft hand at gathering loose strands of impulse into character, and Justine's early contact with different phases of experience had given her a fairly clear view of life in the round, what might be called a sound working topography of its relative heights and depths. She was not seriously afraid of being taken for anything but what she really was, and still less did she fear to become, by force of propinquity and suggestion, the kind of being for whom she might be temporarily taken.

When, at Bessy's summons, she had joined the latter at her camp in the Adirondacks, the transition from a fatiguing "case" at Hanaford to a life in which sylvan freedom was artfully blent with the most studied personal luxury, had come as a delicious refreshment to body and brain. She was weary, for the moment, of ugliness, pain and hard work, and life seemed to recover its meaning under the aspect of a graceful leisure. Lynbrook also, whither she had been persuaded to go with Bessy at the end of their woodland cure, had at first amused and interested her. The big house on its spreading terraces, with windows looking over bright gardens to the hazy distances of the plains, seemed a haven of harmless ease and gaiety. Justine was sensitive to the finer graces of luxurious living, to the warm

lights on old pictures and bronzes, the soft mingling of tints in faded rugs and panellings of time-warmed oak. And the existence to which this background formed a setting seemed at first to have the same decorative qualities. It was pleasant, for once, to be among people whose chief business was to look well and take life lightly, and Justine's own buoyancy of nature won her immediate access among the amiable persons who peopled Bessy's week-end parties. If they had only abounded a little more in their own line she might have succumbed to their spell. But it seemed to her that they missed the poetry of their situation, transacting their pleasures with the dreary method and shortness of view of a race tethered to the ledger. Even the verbal flexibility which had made her feel that she was in a world of freer ideas, soon revealed itself as a form of flight from them, in which the race was distinctly to the swift; and Justine's phase of passive enjoyment passed with the return of her physical and mental activity. She was a creature tingling with energy, a little fleeting particle of the power that moves the sun and the other stars, and the deadening influences of the life at Lynbrook roused these tendencies to greater intensity, as a suffocated person will suddenly develop abnormal strength in the struggle for air.

She did not, indeed, regret having come. She was glad to be with Bessy, partly because of the childish friendship which had left such deep traces in her lonely heart, and partly because what she had seen of her friend's situation stirred in her all the impulses of sympathy and service; but the idea of continuing in such a *life*, of sinking into any of the positions of semi-dependence

that an adroit and handsome girl may create for herself in a fashionable woman's train—this possibility never presented itself to Justine till Mrs. Ansell, that afternoon, had put it into words. And to hear it was to revolt from it with all the strength of her inmost nature. The thought of the future troubled her, not so much materially—for she had a light bird-like trust in the morrow's fare—but because her own tendencies seemed to have grown less clear, because she could not rest in them for guidance as she had once done. The renewal of bodily activity had not brought back her faith in her calling: her work had lost the light of consecration. She no longer felt herself predestined to nurse the sick for the rest of her life, and in her inexperience she reproached herself with this instability. Youth and womanhood were in fact crying out in her for their individual satisfaction; but instincts as deep-seated protected her from even a momentary illusion as to the nature of this demand. She wanted happiness, and a life of her own, as passionately as young flesh-and-blood had ever wanted them; but they must come bathed in the light of imagination and penetrated by the sense of larger affinities. She could not conceive of shutting herself into a little citadel of personal well-being while the great tides of existence rolled on unheeded outside. Whether they swept treasure to her feet, or strewed her life with wreckage, she felt, even now, that her place was there, on the banks, in sound and sight of the great current; and just in proportion as the scheme of life at Lynbrook succeeded in shutting out all sense of that vaster human consciousness, so did its voice speak more thrillingly within her.

Somewhere, she felt—but, alas! still out of reach—was the life she longed for, a life in which high chances of doing should be mated with the finer forms of enjoying. But what title had she to a share in such an existence? Why, none but her sense of what it was worth—and what did that count for, in a world which used all its resources to barricade itself against all its opportunities? She knew there were girls who sought, by what is called a “good” marriage, an escape into the outer world of doing and thinking—utilising an empty brain and full pocket as the key to these envied fields. Some such chance the life at Lynbrook seemed likely enough to offer—one is not, at Justine’s age and with her penetration, any more blind to the poise of one’s head than to the turn of one’s ideas; but here the subtler obstacles of taste and pride intervened. Not even Bessy’s transparent manoeuvrings, her tender solicitude for her friend’s happiness, could for a moment weaken Justine’s resistance. If she must marry without love—and this was growing conceivable to her—she must at least merge her craving for personal happiness in some view of life in harmony with hers.

A tap on her door interrupted these musings, to one aspect of which Bessy Amherst’s entrance seemed suddenly to give visible expression.

“Why did you run off, Justine? You promised to be downstairs when I came back from tennis.”

“*Till* you came back—wasn’t it, dear?” Justine corrected with a smile, pushing her armchair forward as Bessy continued to linger irresolutely in the doorway. “I saw that there was a fresh supply of tea in the

drawing-room, and I knew you would be there before the omnibus came from the station."

"Oh, I was there—but everybody was asking for you——"

"Everybody?" Justine gave a mocking lift to her dark eyebrows.

"Well—Westy Gaines, at any rate; the moment he set foot in the house!" Bessy declared with a laugh as she dropped into the armchair.

Justine echoed the laugh, but offered no comment on the statement which accompanied it, and for a moment both women were silent, Bessy tilting her pretty discontented head against the back of the chair, so that her eyes were on a level with those of her friend, who leaned near her in the embrasure of the window.

"I can't understand you, Justine. You know well enough what he's come back for."

"In order to dazzle Hanaford with the fact that he has been staying at Lynbrook!"

"Nonsense—the novelty of that has worn off. He's been here three times since we came back."

"You are admirably hospitable to your family——"

Bessy let her pretty ringed hands fall with a discouraged gesture. "Why do you find him so much worse than—than other people?"

Justine's eyebrows rose again. "In the same capacity? You speak as if I had boundless opportunities of comparison."

"Well, you've Dr. Wyant!" Mrs. Amherst suddenly flung back at her.

Justine coloured under the unexpected thrust, but

met her friend's eyes steadily. "As an alternative to Westy? Well, if I were on a desert island—but I'm not!" she concluded with a careless laugh.

Bessy frowned and sighed. "You can't mean that, of the two—?" She paused and then went on doubtfully: "It's because he's cleverer?"

"Dr. Wyant?" Justine smiled. "It's not making an enormous claim for him!"

"Oh, I know Westy's not brilliant; but stupid men are not always the hardest to live with." She sighed again, and turned on Justine a glance charged with conjugal experience.

Justine had sunk into the window-seat, her thin hands clasping her knee, in the attitude habitual to her meditative moments. "Perhaps not," she assented; "but I don't know that I should care for a man who made life easy; I should want someone who made it interesting."

Bessy met this with a pitying exclamation. "Don't imagine you invented that! Every girl thinks it. Afterwards she finds out that it's much pleasanter to be thought interesting herself."

She spoke with a bitterness that issued strangely from her lips. It was this bitterness which gave her soft personality the sharp edge that Justine had felt in it on the day of their meeting at Hanaford.

The girl, at first, had tried to defend herself from these scarcely-veiled confidences, distasteful enough in themselves, and placing her, if she listened, in an attitude of implied disloyalty to the man under whose roof they were spoken. But a precocious experience of life had taught her that emotions too strong for the nature

containing them turn, by some law of spiritual chemistry, into a rankling poison; and she had therefore resigned herself to serving as a kind of outlet for Bessy's pent-up discontent. It was not that her friend's grievance appealed to her personal sympathies; she had learned enough of the situation to give her moral assent unreservedly to the other side. But it was characteristic of Justine that where she sympathised least she sometimes pitied most. Like all quick spirits she was often intolerant of dulness; yet when the intolerance passed it left a residue of compassion for the very incapacity at which she chafed. It seemed to her that the tragic crises in wedded life usually turned on the stupidity of one of the two concerned; and of the two victims of such a catastrophe she felt most for the one whose limitations had probably brought it about. After all, there could be no imprisonment as cruel as that of being bounded by a hard small nature. Not to be penetrable at all points to the shifting lights, the wandering music of the world—she could imagine no physical disability as cramping as that. How the little parched soul, in solitary confinement for life, must pine and dwindle in its blind cranny of self-love!

To be oneself wide open to the currents of life does not always contribute to an understanding of narrower natures; but in Justine the personal emotions were enriched and deepened by a sense of participation in all that the world about her was doing, suffering and enjoying; and this sense found expression in the instinct of ministry and solace. She was by nature a redresser, a restorer; and in her work, as she had once told Amherst, the longing to help and direct, to hasten on by personal

intervention time's slow and clumsy processes, had often been in conflict with the restrictions imposed by her profession. But she had no idle desire to probe the depths of other lives; and where there seemed no hope of serving she shrank from fruitless confidences. She was beginning to feel this to be the case with Bessy Amherst. To touch the rock was not enough, if there were but a few drops within it; yet in this barrenness lay the pathos of the situation—and after all, may not the scanty spring be fed from a fuller current?

"I'm not sure about that," she said, answering her friend's last words after a deep pause of deliberation. "I mean about its being so pleasant to be found interesting. I'm sure the passive part is always the dull one: life has been a great deal more thrilling since we found out that we revolved about the sun, instead of sitting still and fancying that all the planets were dancing attendance on us. After all, they were *not*; and it's rather humiliating to think how the morning stars must have laughed together about it!"

There was no self-complacency in Justine's eagerness to help. It was far easier for her to express it in action than in counsel, to grope for the path with her friend than to point the way to it; and when she had to speak she took refuge in figures to escape the pedantry of appearing to advise. But it was not only to Mrs. Dressel that her parables were dark, and the blank look in Bessy's eyes soon snatched her down from the height of metaphor.

"I mean," she continued with a smile, "that, as human nature is constituted, it has got to find its real self—the self to be interested in—outside of what we

conventionally call 'self': the particular Justine or Bessy who is clamouring for her particular morsel of life. You see, self isn't a thing one can keep in a box—bits of it keep escaping, and flying off to lodge in all sorts of unexpected crannies; we come across scraps of ourselves in the most unlikely places—as I believe you would in Westmore, if you'd only go back there and look for them!"

Bessy's lip trembled and the colour sprang to her face; but she answered with a flash of irritation: "Why doesn't *he* look for me there, then—if he still wants to find me?"

"Ah—it's for him to look here—to find himself *here*," Justine murmured.

"Well, he never comes here! That's his answer."

"He will—he will! Only, when he does, let him find you."

"Find me? I don't understand. How can he, when he never sees me? I'm no more to him than the carpet on the floor!"

Justine smiled again. "Well—be that then! The thing is to *be*."

"Under his feet? Thank you! Is that what you mean to marry for? It's not what husbands admire in one, you know!"

"No." Justine stood up with a sense of stealing discouragement. "But I don't think I want to be admired——"

"Ah, that's because you know you are!" broke from the depths of the other's bitterness.

The tone smote Justine, and she dropped into the

seat at her friend's side, silently laying a hand on Bessy's feverishly-clasped fingers.

"Oh, don't let us talk about me," complained the latter, from whose lips the subject was never long absent. "And you mustn't think I *want* you to marry, Justine; not for myself, I mean—I'd so much rather keep you here. I feel much less lonely when you're with me. But you say you won't stay—and it's too dreadful to think of your going back to that dreary hospital."

"But you know the hospital's not dreary to me," Justine interposed; "it's the most interesting place I've ever known."

Mrs. Amherst smiled indulgently on this extravagance. "A great many people go through the craze for philanthropy—" she began in the tone of mature experience; but Justine interrupted her with a laugh.

"Philanthropy? I'm not philanthropic. I don't think I ever felt inclined to do good in the abstract—any more than to do ill! I can't remember that I ever planned out a course of conduct in my life. It's only," she went on, with a puzzled frown, as if honestly trying to analyse her motives, "it's only that I'm so fatally interested in people that before I know it I've slipped into their skins; and then, of course, if anything goes wrong with them, it's just as if it had gone wrong with me; and I can't help trying to rescue myself from *their* troubles! I suppose it's what you'd call meddling—and so should I, if I could only remember that the other people were not myself!"

Bessy received this with the mild tolerance of superior wisdom. Once safe on the tried ground of traditional

authority, she always felt herself Justine's superior. "That's all very well now—you see the romantic side of it," she said, as if humouring her friend's vagaries. "But in time you'll want something else; you'll want a husband and children—a life of your own. And then you'll have to be more practical. It's ridiculous to pretend that comfort and money don't make a difference. And if you married a rich man, just think what a lot of good you could do! Westy will be very well off—and I'm sure he'd let you endow hospitals and things. Think how interesting it would be to build a ward in the very hospital where you'd been a nurse! I read something like that in a novel the other day—it was beautifully described. All the nurses and doctors that the heroine had worked with were there to receive her. . . and her little boy went about and gave toys to the crippled children. . ."

If the speaker's concluding instance hardly produced the effect she had intended, it was perhaps only because Justine's attention had been arrested by the earlier part of the argument. It was strange to have marriage urged on her by a woman who had twice failed to find happiness in it—strange, and yet how vivid a sign that, even to a nature absorbed in its personal demands, not happiness but completeness is the inmost craving! "A life of your own"—that was what even Bessy, in her obscure way, felt to be best worth suffering for. And how was a spirit like Justine's, thrilling with youth and sympathy, to conceive of an isolated existence as the final answer to that craving? A life circumscribed by one's own poor personal consciousness would not be life at all—far better the "adventure of the diver" than the

shivering alone on the bank! Bessy, reading encouragement in her silence, returned her hand-clasp with an affectionate pressure.

"You *would* like that, Justine?" she said, secretly proud of having hit on the convincing argument.

"To endow hospitals with your cousin's money? No; I should want something much more exciting!"

Bessy's face kindled. "You mean travelling abroad—and I suppose New York in winter?"

Justine broke into a laugh. "I was thinking of your cousin himself when I spoke." And to Bessy's disappointed cry—"Then it *is* Dr. Wyant, after all?" she answered lightly, and without resenting the challenge: "I don't know. Suppose we leave it to the oracle."

"The oracle?"

"Time. His question-and-answer department is generally the most reliable in the long run." She started up, gently drawing Bessy to her feet. "And just at present he reminds me that it's nearly six, and that you promised Cicely to go and see her before you dress for dinner."

Bessy rose obediently. "Does he remind you of *your* promises too? You said you'd come down to dinner to-night."

"Did I?" Justine hesitated. "Well, I'm coming," she said, smiling and kissing her friend.

XV.

WHEN the door closed on Mrs. Amherst a resolve which had taken shape in Justine's mind during their talk together made her seat herself at her writing-table, where, after a moment's musing over her suspended pen, she wrote and addressed a hurried note. This business despatched, she put on her hat and jacket, and letter in hand passed down the corridor from her room, and descended to the entrance-hall below. She might have consigned her missive to the post-box which conspicuously tendered its services from a table near the door; but to do so would delay the letter's despatch till morning, and she felt a sudden impatience to see it start.

The tumult on the terrace had transferred itself within doors, and as Justine went down the stairs she heard the click of cues from the billiard-room, the talk and laughter of belated bridge-players, the movement of servants gathering up tea-cups and mending fires. She had hoped to find the hall empty, but the sight of Westy Gaines's figure looming watchfully on the threshold of the smoking-room gave her, at the last bend of the stairs, a little start of annoyance. He would want to know where she was going, he would offer to go with her, and it would take some time and not a little emphasis to make him understand that his society was not desired.

This was the thought that flashed through Justine's mind as she reached the landing; but the next moment it gave way to a contradictory feeling. Westy Gaines was not alone in the hall. From under the stairway rose the voices of a group ensconced in that popular retreat about a chess-board; and as Justine reached the last turn of the stairs she perceived that Mason Winch, an earnest youth with advanced views on political economy, was engaged, to the diversion of a circle of spectators, in teaching the Telfer girls chess. The futility of trying to fix the spasmodic attention of this effervescent couple, and their instructor's grave unconsciousness of the fact, constituted, for the lookers-on, the peculiar diversion of the scene. It was of course inevitable that young Winch, on his arrival at Lynbrook, should have succumbed at once to the tumultuous charms of the Telfer manner, which was equally attractive to inarticulate youth and to tired and talked-out middle-age; but that he should have perceived no resistance in their minds to the deliberative processes of the game of chess, was, even to the Telfers themselves, a source of unmitigated gaiety. Nothing seemed to them funnier than that anyone should credit them with any mental capacity; and they had inexhaustibly amusing ways of drawing out and showing off each other's ignorance.

It was on this scene that Westy's appreciative eyes had been fixed till Justine's appearance drew them to herself. He pronounced her name joyfully, and moved forward to greet her; but as their hands met she understood that he did not mean to press his company upon her. Under the eye of the Lynbrook circle he was

chary of marked demonstrations, and even Mrs. Amherst's approval could not, at such moments, bridge over the gap between himself and the object of his attentions. A Gaines was a Gaines in the last analysis, and apart from any pleasing accident of personality; but what was Miss Brent but the transient vehicle of those graces which Providence has provided for the delectation of the privileged sex?

These influences were visible in the temperate warmth of Westy's manner, and in his way of keeping a backward eye on the mute interchange of comment about the chess-board. At another time his embarrassment would have amused Justine; but the feelings stirred by her talk with Bessy had not subsided, and she recognised with a sting of mortification the resemblance between her view of the Lynbrook set and its estimate of herself. If Bessy's friends were negligible to her she was almost non-existent to them; and, as against herself, they were overwhelmingly provided with tangible means of proving their case.

Such considerations, at a given moment, may prevail decisively even with a nature armed against them by insight and irony; and the mere fact that Westy Gaines did not mean to join her, and that he was withheld from doing so by the invisible pressure of the Lynbrook standards, had the effect of precipitating Justine's floating intentions.

If anything further had been needed to hasten this result, it would have been accomplished by the sound of footsteps which, overtaking her a dozen yards from the house, announced her admirer's impetuous if tardy pursuit. The act of dismissing him, though it took but

a word and was effected with a laugh, left her pride quivering with a hurt the more painful because she would not acknowledge it. That she should waste a moment's resentment on the conduct of a person so unimportant as poor Westy, showed her in a flash the intrinsic falseness of her position at Lynbrook. She saw that to disdain the life about her had not kept her intact from it; and the knowledge made her feel anew the need of some strong decentralising influence, some purifying influx of emotion and activity.

She had walked on quickly through the clear October twilight, which was still saturated with the after-glow of a vivid sunset; and a few minutes brought her to the village stretching along the turnpike beyond the Lynbrook gates. The new post-office dominated the row of shabby houses and "stores" set disjointedly under reddening maples, and its arched doorway formed the centre of Lynbrook's evening intercourse.

Justine, hastening toward the knot of loungers on the threshold, had no consciousness of anything outside of her own thoughts; and as she mounted the steps she was surprised to see Dr. Wyant detach himself from the group and advance to meet her.

"May I post your letter?" he asked, lifting his hat.

His gesture uncovered the close-curling hair of a small delicately-finished head just saved from effeminacy by the vigorous jut of heavy eyebrows meeting above full grey eyes. The eyes again, at first sight, might have struck one as too expressive, or as expressing things too purely decorative for the purposes of a young country doctor with a growing practice; but this estimate was corrected by an unexpected abruptness in their

owner's voice and manner. Perhaps the final impression produced on a close observer by Dr. Stephen Wyant would have been that the contradictory qualities of which he was compounded had not yet been brought into equilibrium by the hand of time.

Justine, in reply to his question, had drawn back a step, slipping her letter into the breast of her jacket.

"That is hardly worth while, since it was addressed to you," she answered with a slight smile as she turned to descend the post-office steps.

Wyant, still carrying his hat, and walking with quick uneven steps, followed her in silence till they had passed beyond earshot of the loiterers on the threshold; then, in the shade of the maple boughs, he pulled up and faced her.

"You've written to say that I may come to-morrow?"

Justine hesitated. "Yes," she said at length.

"Good God! You give royally!" he broke out, pushing his hand with a nervous gesture through the thin dark curls on his forehead.

Justine laughed, with a trace of nervousness in her own tone. "And you talk—well, imperially! Aren't you afraid to bankrupt the language?"

"What do you mean?" he said, staring.

"What do *you* mean? I have merely said that I would see you to-morrow——"

"Well," he retorted, "that's enough for my happiness!"

She sounded her light laugh again. "I'm glad to know you're so easily pleased."

"I'm not! But you couldn't have done a cruel thing without a struggle; and since you're ready to give

me my answer to-morrow, I know it can't be a cruel one."

They had begun to walk onward as they talked, but at this she halted. "Please don't take that tone. I dislike sentimentality!" she exclaimed, with a tinge of imperiousness that was a surprise to her own ears.

It was not the first time in the course of her friendship with Stephen Wyant that she had been startled by this intervention of something within her that resisted and almost resented his homage. When they were apart, she was conscious only of the community of interests and sympathies that had first drawn them together. Why was it then—since his looks were of the kind generally thought to stand a suitor in good stead—that whenever they had met of late she had been subject to these rushes of obscure hostility, the half-physical, half-moral shrinking from some indefinable element in his nature against which she was constrained to defend herself by perpetual pleasantry and evasion?

To Wyant, at any rate, the answer was not far to seek. His pale face reflected the disdain in hers as he returned ironically: "A thousand pardons; I know I'm not always in the key."

"The key?"

"I haven't yet acquired the Lynbrook tone. You must make allowances for my lack of opportunity."

The retort on Justine's lips dropped to silence, as though his words had in fact brought an answer to her inward questioning. Could it be that he was right—that her shrinking from him was the result of an increased sensitiveness to faults of taste that she would

once have despised herself for noticing? When she had first known him, in her work at St. Elizabeth's some three years earlier, his excesses of manner had seemed to her merely the boyish tokens of a richness of nature not yet controlled by experience. Though Wyant was somewhat older than herself there had always been an element of protection in her feeling for him, and it was perhaps this element which formed the real ground of her liking. It was, at any rate, uppermost as she returned, with a softened gleam of mockery: "Since you are so sure of my answer I hardly know why I should see you to-morrow."

"You mean me to take it now?" he exclaimed.

"I don't mean you to take it at all till it's given—above all not to take it for granted!"

His jutting brows drew together again. "Ah, I can't split hairs with you. Won't you put me out of my misery?"

She smiled, but not unkindly. "Do you want an anæsthetic?"

"No—a clean cut with the knife!"

"You forget that we're not allowed to despatch hopeless cases—more's the pity!"

He flushed to the roots of his thin hair. "Hopeless cases? That's it, then—that's my answer?"

They had reached the point where, at the farther edge of the straggling settlement, the tiled roof of the railway-station fronted the post-office cupola; and the shriek of a whistle now reminded Justine that the spot was not propitious to private talk. She halted a moment before speaking.

"I have no answer to give you now but the one in my note—that I'll see you to-morrow."

"But if you're sure of knowing to-morrow you must know now!"

Their eyes met, his eloquently pleading, hers kind but still impenetrable. "If I knew now, you should know too. Please be content with that," she rejoined.

"How can I be, when a day may make such a difference? When I know that every influence about you is fighting against me?"

The words flashed a refracted light far down into the causes of her own uncertainty.

"Ah," she said, drawing a little away from him, "I'm not so sure that I don't like a fight!"

"Is that why you won't give in?" He moved toward her with a despairing gesture. "If I let you go now, you're lost to me!"

She stood her ground, facing him with a quick lift of the head. "If you don't let me go I certainly am," she said; and he drew back, as if conscious of the uselessness of the struggle. His submission, as usual, had a disarming effect on her irritation, and she held out her hand. "Come to-morrow at three," she said, her voice and manner suddenly seeming to give back the hope she had withheld from him.

He seized on her hand with an inarticulate murmur; but at the same moment a louder whistle and the thunder of an approaching train reminded her of the impossibility of prolonging the scene. She was ordinarily careless of appearances, but while she was Mrs. Amherst's guest she did not care to be seen romantically

loitering through the twilight with Stephen Wyant; and she freed herself with a quick good-bye.

He gave her a last look, hesitating and imploring; then, in obedience to her gesture, he turned away and strode off in the opposite direction.

As soon as he had left her she began to retrace her steps toward Lynbrook House; but instead of traversing the whole length of the village she passed through a turnstile in the park fencing, taking a more circuitous but quieter way home.

She walked on slowly through the dusk, wishing to give herself time to think over her conversation with Wyant. Now that she was alone again, it seemed to her that the part she had played had been both inconsistent and undignified. When she had written to Wyant that she would see him on the morrow she had done so with the clear understanding that she was to give, at that meeting, a definite answer to his offer of marriage; and during her talk with Bessy she had suddenly, and, as it seemed to her, irrevocably, decided that the answer should be favourable. From the first days of her acquaintance with Wyant she had appreciated his intelligence and had been stimulated by his zeal for his work. He had remained only six months at Saint Elizabeth's, and though his feeling for her had even then been manifest, it had been kept from expression by the restraint of their professional relation, and by her absorption in her duties. It was only when they had met again at Lynbrook that she had begun to feel a personal interest in him. His youthful promise seemed nearer fulfilment than she had once thought possible, and the contrast he presented to the young men in Bessy's train was

really all in his favour. He had gained in strength and steadiness without losing his high flashes of enthusiasm; and though, even now, she was not in love with him, she began to feel that the union of their common interests might create a life full and useful enough to preclude the possibility of vague repinings. It would, at any rate, take her out of the stagnant circle of her present existence, and restore her to contact with the fruitful energies of life.

All this had seemed quite clear when she wrote her letter; why, then, had she not made use of their chance encounter to give her answer, instead of capriciously postponing it? The act might have been that of a self-conscious girl in her teens; but neither inexperience nor coquetry had prompted it. She had merely yielded to the spirit of resistance that Wyant's presence had of late aroused in her; and the possibility that this resistance might be due to some sense of his social defects, his lack of measure and facility, was so humiliating that for a moment she stood still in the path, half-meaning to turn back and overtake him——

As she paused she was surprised to hear a man's step behind her; and the thought that it might be Wyant's brought about another revulsion of feeling. What right had he to pursue her in this way, to dog her steps even into the Lynbrook grounds? She was sure that his persistent attentions had already attracted the notice of Bessy's visitors; and that he should thus force himself on her after her dismissal seemed suddenly to make their whole relation ridiculous.

She turned about to rebuke him, and found herself *face to face* with John Amherst.

XVI.

AMHERST, on leaving the train at Lynbrook, had paused in doubt on the empty platform. His return was unexpected, and no carriage awaited him; but he caught the signal of the village cab-driver's ready whip. Amherst, however, felt a sudden desire to postpone the moment of arrival, and consigning his luggage to the cab he walked away toward the turnstile through which Justine had passed. In thus taking the longest way home he was yielding another point to his reluctance. He knew that at that hour his wife's visitors might still be assembled in the drawing-room, and he wished to avoid making his unannounced entrance among them.

It was not till now that he felt the embarrassment of such an arrival. For some time past he had known that he ought to go back to Lynbrook, but he had not known how to tell Bessy that he was coming. Lack of habit made him inexpert in the art of easy transitions, and his inability to bridge over awkward gaps had often put him at a disadvantage with his wife and her friends. He had not yet learned the importance of observing the forms which made up the daily ceremonial of their lives, and at present there was just enough soreness between himself and Bessy to make such observances more difficult than usual.

There had been no open estrangement, but peace had been preserved at the cost of a slowly accumulated tale of grievances on both sides. Since Amherst had won his point about the mills, the danger he had foreseen had been realised: his victory at Westmore had been a defeat at Lynbrook. It would be too crude to say that his wife had made him pay for her public concession by the private disregard of his wishes; and if something of this sort had actually resulted, his sense of fairness told him that it was merely the natural reaction of a soft nature against the momentary strain of self-denial. At first he had been hardly aware of this consequence of his triumph. The joy of being able to work his will at Westmore obscured all lesser emotions; and his sentiment for Bessy had long since shrunk into one of those shallow pools of feeling which a sudden tide might fill, but which could never again be the deep perennial spring from which his life was fed.

The need of remaining continuously at Hanaford while the first changes were making had increased the strain of the situation. He had never expected that Bessy would stay there with him—had perhaps, at heart, hardly wished it—and her plan of going to the Adirondacks with Miss Brent seemed to him a satisfactory alternative to the European trip she had renounced. He felt as relieved as though someone had taken off his hands the task of amusing a restless child, and he let his wife go without suspecting that the moment might be a decisive one between them. But it had not occurred to Bessy that anyone could regard six weeks in the Adirondacks as an adequate substitute for a summer abroad. She felt that her sacrifice deserved recognition,

and personal devotion was the only form of recognition which could satisfy her. She had expected Amherst to join her at the camp, but he did not come; and when she went back to Long Island she did not stop to see him, though Hanaford lay in her way. At the moment of her return the work at the mills made it impossible for him to go to Lynbrook; and thus the weeks drifted on without their meeting.

At last, urged by his mother, he had gone down to Long Island for a night; but though, on that occasion, he had announced his coming, he found the house full, and the whole party except Mr. Langhope in the act of starting off to a dinner in the neighbourhood. He was of course expected to go too, and Bessy appeared hurt when he declared that he was too tired and preferred to remain with Mr. Langhope; but she did not suggest staying at home herself, and drove off in a mood of exuberant gaiety. Amherst had been too busy all his life to know what intricacies of perversion a sentimental grievance may develop in an unoccupied mind, and he saw in Bessy's act only a sign of indifference. The next day she complained to him of money difficulties, as though surprised that her income had been suddenly cut down; and when he reminded her that she had consented of her own will to this temporary reduction, she burst into tears and accused him of caring only for Westmore.

He went away exasperated by her inconsequence, and bills from Lynbrook continued to pour in on him. In the first days of their marriage, Bessy had put him in charge of her exchequer, and she was too indolent—and at heart perhaps too sensitive—to ask him to renounce

the charge. It was clear to him, therefore, how little she was observing the spirit of their compact, and his mind was tormented by the anticipation of financial embarrassments. He wrote her a letter of gentle expostulation, but in her answer she ignored his remonstrance; and after that silence fell between them.

The only way to break this silence was to return to Lynbrook; but now that he had come back, he did not know what step to take next. Something in the atmosphere of his wife's existence seemed to paralise his will-power. When all about her spoke a language so different from his own, how could he hope to make himself heard? He knew that her family and her immediate friends—Mr. Langhope, the Gaineses, Mrs. Ansell and Mr. Tredegar—far from being means of communication, were so many sentinels ready to raise the drawbridge and drop the portcullis at his approach. They were all in league to stifle the incipient feelings he had roused in Bessy, to push her back into the deadening routine of her former life, and the only voice that might conceivably speak for him was Miss Brent's.

The "case" which, unexpectedly presented to her by one of the Hope Hospital physicians, had detained Justine at Hanaford during the month of June, was the means of establishing a friendship between herself and Amherst. They did not meet often, or get to know each other very well; but he saw her occasionally at his mother's and at Mrs. Dressel's, and once he took her out to Westmore, to consult her about the emergency hospital which was to be included among the first improvements there. The expedition had been memor-

ble to both; and when, some two weeks later, Bessy wrote suggesting that she should take Miss Brent to the Adirondacks, it seemed to Amherst that there was no one whom he would rather have his wife choose as her companion.

He was much too busy at the time to cultivate or analyse his feeling for Miss Brent; he rested vaguely in the thought of her, as of the "nicest" girl he had ever met, and was frankly pleased when accident brought them together; but the seeds left in both their minds by these chance encounters had not yet begun to germinate.

So unperceived had been their gradual growth in intimacy that it was a surprise to Amherst to find himself suddenly thinking of her as a means of communication with his wife; but the thought gave him such encouragement that, when he saw Justine in the path before him he went toward her with unusual eagerness.

Justine, on her part, felt an equal pleasure. She knew that Bessy did not expect her husband, and that his prolonged absence had already been the cause of malicious comment at Lynbrook; and she caught at the hope that this sudden return might betoken a more favourable turn of affairs.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed; and her tone had the effect of completing his reassurance, in a happy sense that she would understand and help him.

"I wanted to see you too," he began confusedly; then, conscious of the intimacy of the phrase, he added with a slight laugh: "The fact is, I'm a culprit looking for a peace-maker."

"A culprit?"

"I've been so tied down at the mills that I didn't know, till yesterday, just when I could break away; and in the hurry of leaving—" He paused again, checked by the impossibility of uttering, to the girl before him, the little conventional falsehoods which formed the small currency of Bessy's circle. Not that any scruple of probity restrained him: in trifling matters he recognised the usefulness of such counters in the social game; but when he was with Justine he always felt the obscure need of letting his real self be seen.

"I was stupid enough not to telegraph," he said, "and I am afraid my wife will think me negligent: she often has to reproach me for my sins of omission, and this time I know they are many."

The girl received this in silence, less from embarrassment than from surprise; for she had already guessed that it was as difficult for Amherst to touch, even lightly, on his private affairs, as it was instinctive with his wife to pour her grievances into any willing ear. Justine's first thought was one of gratification that he should have spoken, and of eagerness to facilitate the saying of whatever he wished to say; but before she could answer he went on hastily: "The fact is, Bessy does not know how complicated the work at Westmore is; and when I caught sight of you just now I was thinking that you are the only one of her friends who has any technical understanding of what I am trying to do, and who might consequently help her to see how hard it is for me to take my hand from the plough."

Justine listened gravely, longing to cry out her com-

prehension and sympathy, but restrained by the sense that the moment was a critical one, where impulse must not be trusted too far. It was quite possible that a reaction of pride might cause Amherst to repent even so guarded an avowal; and if that happened, he might never forgive her for having encouraged him to speak. She looked up at him with a smile.

"Why not tell Bessy yourself? Your understanding of the case is a good deal clearer than mine or anyone else's."

"Oh, Bessy is tired of hearing about it from me; and besides—" She detected a shade of disappointment in his tone, and was sorry she had said anything which might seem meant to discourage his confidence. It occurred to her also that she had been insincere in not telling him at once that she had already been let into the secret of his domestic differences: she felt the same craving as Amherst for absolute openness between them.

"I know," she said, almost timidly, "that Bessy has not been quite content of late to have you given so much time to Westmore, and perhaps she herself thinks it is because the work there does not interest her; but I believe it is for a different reason."

"What reason?" he asked with a look of surprise.

"Because Westmore takes you from her; because she thinks you are happier there than at Lynbrook."

The day had faded so rapidly that it was no longer possible for the speakers to see each other's faces, and it was easier for both to communicate through the veil of deepening obscurity.

"But, good heavens, she might be there with me—

she's as much needed there as I am!" Amherst exclaimed.

"Yes; but you must remember that it's against all her habits—and against the point of view of everyone about her—that she should lead that kind of life; and meanwhile——"

"Well?"

"Meanwhile, isn't it expedient that you should, a little more, lead hers?"

Always the same answer to his restless questioning! His mother's answer, the answer of Bessy and her friends. He had somehow hoped that the girl at his side would find a different solution to the problem, and his disappointment escaped in a bitter exclamation.

"But Westmore is my life—hers too, if she knew it! I can't desert it now without being as false to her as to myself!"

As he spoke, he was overcome once more by the hopelessness of trying to put his case clearly. How could Justine, for all her quickness and sympathy, understand a situation of which the deeper elements were necessarily unknown to her? The advice she gave him was natural enough, and on her lips it seemed not the counsel of a shallow expediency, but the plea of compassion and understanding. But she knew nothing of the long struggle for mutual adjustment which had culminated in this crisis between himself and his wife, and she could therefore not see that, if he yielded his point, and gave up his work at Westmore, the concession would mean not renewal but destruction. He felt that he should hate Bessy if he won her back at that price; and the violence of his feeling frightened him.

It was, in truth, as he had said, his own life that he was fighting for. If he gave up Westmore he could not fall back on the futile activities of Lynbrook, and fate might yet have some lower alternative to offer. He could trust to his own strength and self-command while his energies had a normal outlet; but idleness and self-indulgence might work in him like a dangerous drug.

Justine kept steadily to her point. "Westmore must be foremost to both of you in time; I don't see how either of you can escape that. But the realisation of it must come to Bessy through *you*, and for that reason I think that you ought to be more patient—that you ought even to put the question aside for a time and enter a little more into her life while she is learning to understand yours." As she ended, it seemed to her that what she had said was trite and ineffectual, and yet that it might have passed the measure of discretion; and, torn between two doubts, she added hastily: "But you have done just that in coming back now—that is the real solution of the problem."

While she spoke they passed out of the wood-path they had been following, and rounding a mass of shrubbery emerged on the lawn below the terraces. The long bulk of the house lay above them, dark against the lingering gleam of the west, with brightly-lit windows marking its irregular outline; and the sight produced in Amherst and Justine a vague sense of helplessness and constraint. It was impossible to speak with the same freedom, confronted by that substantial symbol of the accepted order, which seemed to glare down on them in massive disdain of their puny efforts to deflect

the course of events; and Amherst, without reverting to her last words, asked after a moment if his wife had many guests.

He listened in silence while Justine ran over the list of names—the Telfer girls and their brother, Mason Winch and Westy Gaines, a cluster of young bridge-playing couples, and, among the last arrivals, the Fenton Carburys and Ned Bowfort. The names were all familiar to Amherst—he knew they represented the flower of week-end fashion; but he did not remember having seen the Carburys among his wife's guests, and his mind paused on the name, seeking to regain some lost impression connected with it. But it evoked, like the others, merely the confused sense of stridency and unrest which he had brought away from his last Lynbrook visit; and this reminiscence made him ask Miss Brent, when her list was ended, if she did not think that so continuous a succession of visitors was too tiring for Bessy.

“I sometimes think it tires her more than she knows; but I hope she can be persuaded to take better care of herself now that Mrs. Ansell has come back.”

Amherst halted abruptly. “Is Mrs. Ansell here?”

“She arrived from Europe to-day.”

“And Mr. Langhope too, I suppose?”

“Yes. He came from Newport about ten days ago.”

Amherst checked himself, conscious that his questions betrayed the fact that he and his wife no longer wrote to each other. The same thought appeared to strike Justine, and they walked across the lawn in silence, hastening their steps involuntarily, as though to escape the oppressive weight of the words which had

passed between them. But Justine was unwilling that this fruitless sense of oppression should be the final outcome of their talk; and when they reached the upper terrace she paused and turned impulsively to Amherst. As she did so, the light from an uncurtained window fell on her face, which glowed with the inner brightness kindled in it by moments of strong feeling.

"I am sure of one thing—Bessy will be very, very glad that you have come," she exclaimed.

"Thank you," he answered.

Their hands met mechanically, and she turned away and entered the house.

XVII.

BESSY had not seen her little girl that day, and filled with compunction by Justine's reminder, she hastened directly to the school-room.

Of late, in certain moods, her maternal tenderness had been clouded by a sense of uneasiness in the child's presence, for Cicely was the argument most effectually used by Mr. Langhope and Mr. Tredegar in their efforts to check the triumph of Amherst's ideas. Bessy, still unable to form an independent opinion on the harassing question of the mills, continued to oscillate between the views of the contending parties, now regarding Cicely as an innocent victim and herself as an unnatural mother, sacrificing her child's prospects to further Amherst's enterprise, and now conscious of a vague animosity against the little girl, as the chief cause of the dissensions which had so soon clouded the skies of her second marriage. Then again, there were moments when Cicely's rosy bloom reminded her bitterly of the child she had lost—the son on whom her ambitions had been fixed. It seemed to her now that if their boy had lived she might have kept Amherst's love and have played a more important part in his life; and brooding on the tragedy of the child's sickly existence she resented the contrast of Cicely's brightness and

vigour. The result was that in her treatment of her daughter she alternated between moments of exaggerated devotion and days of neglect, never long happy away from the little girl, yet restless and self-tormenting in her presence.

After her talk with Justine she felt more than usually disturbed, as she always did when her unprofitable impulses of self-exposure had subsided. Bessy's mind was not made for introspection, and chance had burdened it with unintelligible problems. She felt herself the victim of circumstances to which her imagination attributed the deliberate malice that children ascribe to the furniture they run against in playing. This helped her to cultivate a sense of helpless injury and to disdain in advance the advice she was perpetually seeking. How absurd it was, for instance, to suppose that a girl could understand the feelings of a married woman! Justine's suggestion that she should humble herself still further to Amherst merely left in Bessy's mind a rankling sense of being misunderstood and undervalued by those to whom she turned in her extremity, and she said to herself, in a phrase that sounded well in her own ears, that sooner or later every woman must learn to fight her battles alone.

In this mood she entered the room where Cicely was at supper with her governess, and enveloped the child in a whirl of passionate caresses. But Cicely had inherited the soberer Westmore temper, and her mother's spasmodic endearments always had a repressive effect on her. She dutifully returned a small fraction of Bessy's kisses, and then, with an air of relief, addressed herself once more to her bread and marmalade.

"You don't seem a bit glad to see me!" Bessy exclaimed, while the little governess made a nervous pretence of being greatly amused at this prodigious paradox, and Cicely, setting down her silver mug, asked judicially: "Why should I be gladder than other days? It isn't a birthday."

This Cordelia-like answer cut Bessy to the quick. "You horrid child to say such a cruel thing when you know I love you better and better every minute! But you don't care for me any longer because Justine has taken you away from me!"

This last charge had sprung into her mind in the act of uttering it, but now that it was spoken it instantly assumed the proportions of a fact, and seemed to furnish another justification for her wretchedness. Bessy was not naturally jealous, but her imagination was thrall to the spoken word, and it gave her a sudden incomprehensible relief to associate Justine with the obscure causes of her suffering.

"I know she's cleverer than I am, and more amusing, and can tell you about plants and animals and things . . . and I daresay she tells you how tiresome and stupid I am. . ."

She sprang up suddenly, abashed by Cicely's astonished gaze, and by the governess's tremulous attempt to continue to treat the scene as one of "Mamma's" most successful pleasantries.

"Don't mind me—my head aches horribly. I think I'll rush off for a gallop on Impulse before dinner. Miss Dill, Cicely's nails are a sight—I suppose that comes of grubbing up wild-flowers."

And with this parting shot at Justine's pursuits she

swept out of the school-room, leaving pupil and teacher plunged in a stricken silence from which Cicely at length emerged to say, with the candour that Miss Dill dreaded more than any punishable offence: "Mother's prettiest—but I do like Justine the best."

It was nearly dark when Bessy mounted the horse which had been hastily saddled in response to her order; but it was her habit to ride out alone at all hours, and of late nothing but a hard gallop had availed to quiet her nerves. Her craving for occupation had increased as her life became more dispersed and agitated, and the need to fill every hour drove her to excesses of bodily exertion, since other forms of activity were unknown to her.

As she cantered along under the twilight sky, with a strong sea-breeze in her face, the rush of air and the effort of steadying her nervous thoroughbred filled her with a glow of bodily energy from which her thoughts emerged somewhat cleansed of their bitterness.

She had been odious to poor little Cicely, for whom she now felt a sudden remorseful yearning which almost made her turn her horse's head homeward, that she might dash upstairs and do penance beside the child's bed. And that she should have accused Justine of taking Cicely from her! It frightened her to find herself thinking evil of Justine. Bessy, whose perceptions were keen enough in certain directions, knew that her second marriage had changed her relation to all her former circle of friends. Though they still rallied about her, keeping up the convenient habit of familiar intercourse, she had begun to be aware that their view of

her had in it an element of criticism and compassion. She had once fancied that Amherst's good looks, and the other qualities she had seen in him, would immediately make him free of the charmed circle in which she moved; but she was discouraged by his disregard of his opportunities, and above all by the fundamental differences in his view of life. He was never common or ridiculous, but she saw that he would never acquire the small social facilities. He was fond of exercise, but it bored him to talk of it. The men's smoking-room anecdotes did not amuse him, he was unmoved by the fluctuations of the stock-market, he could not tell one card from another, and his perfunctory attempts at billiards had once caused Mr. Langhope to murmur, in his daughter's hearing: "Ah, that's the test—I always said so!"

Thus debarred from what seemed to Bessy the chief points of contact with life, how could Amherst hope to impose himself on minds versed in these larger relations? As the sense of his social insufficiency grew on her, Bessy became more sensitive to that latent criticism of her marriage which—intolerable thought!—involved a judgment on herself. She was increasingly eager for the approval and applause of her little audience, yet increasingly distrustful of their sincerity, and more miserably persuaded that she and her husband were the butt of some of their most effective stories. She knew also that rumours of the disagreement about Westmore were abroad, and the suspicion that Amherst's conduct was the subject of unfriendly comment provoked in her a reaction of loyalty to his ideas. . .

From this turmoil of conflicting influences only her

friendship with Justine Brent remained secure. Though Justine's adaptability made it easy for her to fit into the Lynbrook life, Bessy knew that she stood as much outside of it as Amherst. She could never, for instance, be influenced by what Maria Ansell and the Gaineses and the Telfers thought. She had her own criteria of conduct, unintelligible to Bessy, but giving her an independence of mind on which her friend leaned in a kind of blind security. And that even her faith in Justine should suddenly be poisoned by a jealous thought seemed to prove that the consequences of her marriage were gradually infecting her whole life. Bessy could conceive of masculine devotion only as subservient to its divinity's least wish, and she argued that if Amherst had really loved her he could not so lightly have disturbed the foundations of her world. And so her tormented thoughts, perpetually circling on themselves, reverted once more to their central grievance—the failure of her marriage. If her own love had died out it would have been much simpler—she was surrounded by examples of the mutual evasion of a troublesome tie. There was Blanche Carbury, for instance, with whom she had lately struck up an absorbing friendship . . . it was perfectly clear that Blanche Carbury wondered how much more she was going to stand! But it was the torment of Bessy's situation that it involved a radical contradiction, that she still loved Amherst though she could not forgive him for having married her.

Perhaps what she most suffered from was his too-prompt acceptance of the semi-estrangement between them. After nearly three years of marriage she had

still to learn that it was Amherst's way to wrestle with the angel till dawn, and then to go about his other business. Her own mind could revolve in the same grievance as interminably as a squirrel in its wheel, and her husband's habit of casting off the accepted fact seemed to betoken poverty of feeling. If only he had striven a little harder to keep her—if, even now, he would come back to her, and make her feel that she was more to him than those wretched mills!

When she turned her mare toward Lynbrook, the longing to see Amherst was again uppermost. He had not written for weeks—she had been obliged to tell Maria Ansell that she knew nothing of his plans, and it mortified her to think that everyone was aware of his neglect. Yet, even now, if on reaching the house she should find a telegram to say that he was coming, the weight of loneliness would be lifted, and everything in life would seem different. . .

Her high-strung mare, scenting the homeward road, and excited by the fantastic play of wayside lights and shadows, swept her along at a wild gallop with which the fevered rush of her thoughts kept pace, and when she reached the house she dropped from the saddle with aching wrists and brain benumbed.

She entered by a side door, to avoid meeting anyone, and ran upstairs at once, knowing that she had barely time to dress for dinner. As she opened the door of her sitting-room someone rose from the chair by the fire, and she stood still, facing her husband. . .

It was the moment both had desired, yet when it came it found them tongue-tied and helpless.

Bessy was the first to speak. "When did you get here? You never wrote me you were coming!"

Amherst advanced toward her, holding out his hand. "No; you must forgive me. I have been very busy," he said.

Always the same excuse! The same thrusting at her of the hateful fact that Westmore came first, and that she must put up with whatever was left of his time and thoughts!

"You are always too busy to let me hear from you," she said coldly, and the hand which had sprung toward his fell back to her side.

Even then, if he had only said frankly: "It was too difficult—I didn't know how," the note of truth would have reached and moved her; but he had striven for the tone of ease and self-restraint that was habitual among her friends, and as usual his attempt had been a failure.

"I am sorry—I'm a bad hand at writing," he rejoined; and his evil genius prompted him to add: "I hope my coming is not inconvenient?"

The colour rose to Bessy's face. "Of course not. But it must seem rather odd to our visitors that I should know so little of your plans."

At this he humbled himself still further. "I know I don't think enough about appearances—I'll try to do better the next time."

Appearances! He spoke as if she had been reproaching him for a breach of etiquette . . . it never occurred to him that the cry came from her humiliated heart! The tide of warmth that always enveloped her in his presence was receding, and in its place a chill fluid seemed to creep up slowly to her throat and lips.

In Amherst, meanwhile, the opposite process was taking place. His wife was still to him the most beautiful woman in the world, or rather, perhaps, the only woman to whose beauty his eyes had been opened. That beauty could never again penetrate to his heart, but it still touched his senses, not with passion but with a caressing kindliness, such as one might feel for the bright movements of a bird or a kitten. It seemed to plead with him not to ask of her more than she could give—to be content with the outward grace and not seek in it an inner meaning. He moved toward her again, and took her passive hands in his.

“You look tired. Why do you ride so late?”

“Oh, I just wanted to give Impulse a gallop. I hadn’t time to take her out earlier, and if I let the grooms exercise her they’ll spoil her mouth.”

Amherst frowned. “You ought not to ride that mare alone at night. She shies at everything after dark.”

“She’s the only horse I care for—the others are all cows,” she murmured, releasing her hands impatiently.

“Well, you must take me with you the next time you ride her.”

She softened a little, in spite of herself. Riding was the only amusement he cared to share with her, and the thought of a long gallop across the plains at his side brought back the warmth to her veins.

“Yes, we’ll go to-morrow. How long do you mean to stay?” she asked, looking up at him eagerly.

He was pleased that she should wish to know, yet the question embarrassed him, for it was necessary that he should be back at Westmore within three days, and he could not put her off with an evasion.

Bessy saw his hesitation, and her colour rose again. "I only asked," she explained, "because there is to be a fancy ball at the Hunt Club on the twentieth, and I thought of giving a big dinner here first."

Amherst did not understand that she too had her inarticulate moments, and that the allusion to the fancy ball was improvised to hide an eagerness to which he had been too slow in responding. He thought she had inquired about his plans only that he might not again interfere with the arrangements of her dinner-table. If that was all she cared about, it became suddenly easy to tell her that he could not stay, and he answered lightly: "Fancy balls are a little out of my line; but at any rate I shall have to be back at the mills the day after to-morrow."

The disappointment brought a rush of bitterness to her lips. "The day after to-morrow? It seems hardly worth while to have come so far for two days!"

"Oh, I don't mind the journey—and there are one or two matters I must consult you about."

There could hardly have been a more ill-advised answer, but Amherst was reckless now. If she cared for his coming only that he might fill a place at a fancy-dress dinner, he would let her see that he had come only because he had to go through the form of submitting to her certain measures to be taken at Westmore.

Bessy was beginning to feel the physical reaction of her struggle with the mare. The fatigue which at first had deadened her nerves now woke them to acuter sensibility, and an appealing word from her husband would have drawn her to his arms. But his answer seemed to drive all the blood back to her heart.

"I don't see why you still go through the form of consulting me about Westmore, when you have always done just as you pleased there, without regard to me or Cicely."

Amherst made no answer, silenced by the discouragement of hearing the same old grievance on her lips; and she too seemed struck, after she had spoken, by the unprofitableness of such retorts.

"It doesn't matter—of course I'll do whatever you wish," she went on listlessly. "But I could have sent my signature, if that is all you came for—"

"Thanks," said Amherst coldly. "I shall remember that the next time."

They stood silent for a moment, he with his eyes fixed on her, she with averted head, twisting her riding-whip between her fingers; then she said suddenly: "We shall be late for dinner," and passing into her dressing-room she closed the door.

Amherst roused himself as she disappeared.

"Bessy!" he exclaimed, moving toward her; but as he approached the door he heard her maid's voice within, and turning away he went to his own room.

Bessy came down late to dinner, with vivid cheeks and an air of improvised ease; and the manner of her entrance, combined with her husband's unannounced arrival, produced in their observant guests the sense of latent complications. Mr. Langhope, though evidently unaware of his son-in-law's return till they greeted each other in the drawing-room, was too good a card-player to betray surprise, and Mrs. Ansell outdid herself in the delicate art of taking everything for granted; but

these very dissimulations sharpened the perception of the other guests, whom long practice had rendered expert in interpreting such signs.

Of all this Justine Brent was aware; and conscious also that, by everyone but herself, the suspected estrangement between the Amhersts was regarded as turning merely on the question of money. To the greater number of persons present there was, in fact, no other conceivable source of conjugal discord, since every known complication could be adjusted by means of the universal lubricant. It was this unanimity of view which bound together in the compactness of a new feudalism the members of Bessy Amherst's world; which supplied them with their pass-words and social tests, and defended them securely against the insidious attack of ideas.

The Genius of History, capriciously directing the antics of its marionettes, sometimes lets the drama languish through a series of unrelated episodes, and then, suddenly quickening the pace, packs into one scene the stuff of a dozen. The chance meeting of Amherst and Justine, seemingly of no significance to either, contained the germ of developments of which both had begun to be aware before the evening was over. Their short talk—the first really intimate exchange of words between them—had the effect of creating a sense of solidarity that grew apace in the atmosphere of the Lynbrook dinner-table.

Justine was always reluctant to take part in Bessy's week-end dinners, but as she descended the stairs that

evening she did not regret having promised to be present. She frankly wanted to see Amherst again—his tone, his view of life, reinforced her own convictions, restored her faith in the reality and importance of all that Lynbrook ignored and excluded. Her extreme sensitiveness to surrounding vibrations of thought and feeling told her, as she glanced at him between the flowers and candles of the long dinner-table, that he too was obscurely aware of the same effect; and it flashed across her that they were unconsciously drawn together by the fact that they were the only two strangers in the room. Everyone else had the same standpoint, spoke the same language, drew on the same stock of allusions, used the same weights and measures in estimating persons and actions. Between Mr. Langhope's indolent acuteness of mind and the rudimentary processes of the rosy Telfers there was a difference of degree but not of kind. If Mr. Langhope viewed the spectacle more objectively, it was not because he had outlived the sense of its importance, but because years of experience had familiarised him with its minutest details; and this familiarity with the world he lived in had bred a profound contempt for any other.

In no way could the points of contact between Amherst and Justine Brent have been more vividly brought out than by their tacit exclusion from the currents of opinion about them. Amherst, seated in unsmiling endurance at the foot of the table, between Mrs. Ansell, with her carefully-distributed affabilities, and Blanche Carbury, with her reckless hurling of conversational pebbles, seemed to Justine as much of a stranger as

herself among the people to whom his marriage had introduced him. So strongly did she feel the sense of their common isolation that it was no surprise to her, when the men reappeared in the drawing-room after dinner, to have her host thread his way, between the unfolding bridge-tables, straight to the corner where she sat. Amherst's methods in the drawing-room were still as direct as in the cotton-mill. He always went up at once to the person he sought, without preliminary waste of tactics; and on this occasion Justine, without knowing what had passed between himself and Bessy, suspected from the appearance of both that their talk had resulted in increasing Amherst's desire to be with someone to whom he could speak freely and naturally on the subject nearest his heart.

She began at once to question him about Westmore, and the change in his face showed that his work was still a refuge from all that made life disheartening and unintelligible. Whatever convictions had been thwarted or impaired in him, his faith in the importance of his task remained unshaken; and the firmness with which he held to it filled Justine with a sense of his strength. The feeling kindled her own desire to escape again into the world of deeds, yet by a sudden reaction it checked the growing inclination for Stephen Wyant that had resulted from her revolt against Lynbrook. Here was a man as careless as Wyant of the minor forms, yet her appreciation of him was not affected by the lack of adaptability that she accused herself of criticising in her suitor. She began to see that it was not the sense of Wyant's social deficiencies that had held her back;

and the discovery at once set free her judgment of him, enabling her to penetrate to the real causes of her reluctance. She understood now that the flaw she felt was far deeper than any defect of manner. It was the sense in him of something unstable and incalculable, something at once weak and violent, that was brought to light by the contrast of Amherst's quiet resolution. Here was a man whom no gusts of chance could deflect from his purpose; while she felt that the career to which Wyant had so ardently given himself would always be at the mercy of his passing emotions.

As the distinction grew clearer, Justine trembled to think that she had so nearly pledged herself, without the excuse of love, to a man whose failings she could judge so lucidly. . . . But had she ever really thought of marrying Wyant? While she continued to talk with Amherst such a possibility became more and more remote, till she began to feel it was no more than a haunting dream. But her promise to see Wyant the next day reminded her of the nearness of her peril. How could she have played with her fate so lightly—she, who held her life so dear because she felt in it such untried powers of action and emotion? She continued to listen to Amherst's account of his work, with enough outward self-possession to place the right comment and put the right question, yet conscious only of the quiet strength she was absorbing from his presence, of the way in which his words, his voice, his mere nearness were slowly steadying and clarifying her will.

In the smoking-room, after the ladies had gone upstairs, Amherst continued to acquit himself mechanically

of his duties, against the incongruous background of his predecessor's remarkable sporting-prints — for it was characteristic of his relation to Lynbrook that his life there was carried on in the setting of foils and boxing-gloves, firearms and racing-trophies, which had expressed Dick Westmore's ideals. Never very keenly alive to his material surroundings, and quite unconscious of the irony of this proximity, Amherst had come to accept his wife's guests as unquestioningly as their background, and with the same sense of their being an inevitable part of his new life. Their talk was no more intelligible to him than the red and yellow hieroglyphics of the racing-prints, and he smoked in silence while Mr. Langhope discoursed to Westy Gaines on the recent sale of Chinese porcelains at which he had been lucky enough to pick up the set of Ming for his daughter, and Mason Winch expounded to a group of languid listeners the essential dependence of the labouring-man on the prosperity of Wall Street. In a retired corner, Ned Bowfort was imparting facts of a more personal nature to a chosen following who hailed with suppressed enjoyment the murmured mention of proper names; and now and then Amherst found himself obliged to say to Fenton Carbury, who with one accord had been left on his hands, "Yes, I understand the flat-tread tire is best," or, "There's a good deal to be said for the low tension magneto——"

But all the while his conscious thoughts were absorbed in the remembrance of his talk with Justine Brent. He had left his wife's presence in that state of moral lassitude when the strongest hopes droop under

the infection of indifference and hostility, and the effort of attainment seems out of all proportion to the end in view; but as he listened to Justine all his energies sprang to life again. Here at last was someone who felt the urgency of his task: her every word and look confirmed her comment of the afternoon: "Westmore must be foremost to you both in time—I don't see how either of you can escape it."

She saw it, as he did, to be the special outlet offered for the expression of what he was worth to the world; and with the knowledge that one other person recognised his call, it sounded again loudly in his heart. Yes, he would go on, patiently and persistently, conquering obstacles, suffering delay, enduring criticism—hardest of all, bearing with his wife's deepening indifference and distrust. Justine had said "Westmore must be foremost to you both," and he would prove that she was right—spite of the powers leagued against him he would win over Bessy in the end!

Those observers who had been struck by the length and animation of Miss Brent's talk with her host—and among whom Mrs. Ansell and Westy Gaines were foremost—would hardly have believed how small a part her personal charms had played in attracting him. Amherst was still under the power of the other kind of beauty—the soft graces personifying the first triumph of sex in his heart—and Justine's dark slenderness could not at once dispel the milder image. He watched her with pleasure while she talked, but her face interested him only as the vehicle of her ideas—she looked as a girl must look who felt and thought as she did.

He was aware that everything about her was quick and fine and supple, and that the muscles of character lay close to the surface of feeling; but the interpenetration of spirit and flesh that made her body seem like the bright projection of her mind left him unconscious of anything but the oneness of their thoughts.

So these two, in their hour of doubt, poured strength into each other's hearts, each unconscious of what they gave, and of its hidden power of renewing their own purposes.

XVIII.

IF Mr. Langhope had ever stooped to such facile triumphs as that summed up in the convenient "I told you so," he would have loosed the phrase on Mrs. Ansell in the course of a colloquy which these two, the next afternoon, were at some pains to defend from the incursions of the Lynbrook house-party.

Mrs. Ansell was the kind of woman who could encircle herself with privacy on an excursion-boat and create a nook in an hotel drawing-room, but it taxed even her ingenuity to segregate herself from the Telfers. When the feat was accomplished, and it became evident that Mr. Langhope could yield himself securely to the joys of confidential discourse, he paused on the brink of disclosure to say: "It's as well I saved that Ming from the ruins."

"What ruins?" she exclaimed, her startled look giving him the full benefit of the effect he was seeking to produce.

He addressed himself deliberately to the selecting and lighting of a cigarette. "Truscomb is down and out—resigned, 'the wise it call.' And the alterations at Westmore are going to cost a great deal more than my experienced son-in-law expected. This is Westy's morning budget—he and Amherst had it out last night.

I tell my poor girl that at least she'll lose nothing when the *bibelots* I've bought for her go up the spout."

Mrs. Ansell received this with a troubled countenance. "What has become of Bessy? I've not seen her since luncheon."

"No. She and Blanche Carbury have motored over to dine with the Nick Ledgers at Islip."

"Did you see her before she left?"

"For a moment, but she said very little. Westy tells me that Amherst hints at leasing the New York house. One can understand that she's left speechless."

Mrs. Ansell, at this, sat bolt upright. "The New York house?" But she broke off to add, with seeming irrelevance: "If you knew how I detest Blanche Carbury!"

Mr. Langhope made a gesture of semi-acquiescence. "She is not the friend I should have chosen for Bessy—but we know that Providence makes use of strange instruments."

"Providence and Blanche Carbury?" She stared at him. "Ah, you are profoundly corrupt!"

"I have the coarse masculine habit of looking facts in the face. Woman-like, you prefer to make use of them privately, and cut them when you meet in public."

"Blanche is not the kind of fact I should care to make use of under any circumstances whatever!"

"No one asks you to. Simply regard her as a force of nature—let her alone, and don't put up too many lightning-rods."

She raised her eyes to his face. "Do you really mean that you want Bessy to get a divorce?"

"Your style is elliptical, dear Maria; but divorce

does not frighten me very much. It has grown almost as painless as modern dentistry."

"It's our odious insensibility that makes it so!"

Mr. Langhope received this with the mildness of suspended judgment. "How else, then, do you propose that Bessy shall save what is left of her money?"

"I would rather see her save what is left of her happiness. Bessy will never be happy in the new way."

"What do you call the new way?"

"Launching one's boat over a human body—or several, as the case may be!"

"But don't you see that, as an expedient to bring this madman to reason——"

"I've told you that you don't understand him!"

Mr. Langhope turned on her with what would have been a show of temper in anyone less provided with shades of manner. "Well, then, explain him, for God's sake!"

"I might explain him by saying that she's still in love with him."

"Ah, if you're still imprisoned in the old formulas!"

Mrs. Ansell confronted him with a grave face. "Isn't that precisely what Bessy is? Isn't she one of the most harrowing victims of the plan of bringing up our girls in the double bondage of expediency and unreality, corrupting their bodies with luxury and their brains with sentiment, and leaving them to reconcile the two as best they can, or lose their souls in the attempt?"

Mr. Langhope smiled. "I may observe that, with my poor child so early left alone to me, I supposed I

was doing my best in committing her guidance to some of the most admirable women I know."

"Of whom I was one—and not the least lamentable example of the system! Of course the only thing that saves us from their vengeance," Mrs. Ansell added, "is that so few of them ever stop to think. . ."

"And yet, as I make out, it's precisely what you would have Bessy do!"

"It's what neither you nor I can help her doing. You've given her just acuteness enough to question, without consecutiveness enough to explain. But if she must perish in the struggle—and I see no hope for her—" cried Mrs. Ansell, starting suddenly and dramatically to her feet, "at least let her perish defending her ideals and not denying them—even if she has to sell the New York house and all your china pots into the bargain!"

Mr. Langhope, rising also, deprecatingly lifted his hands, "If that's what you call saving me from her vengeance—sending the crockery crashing round my ears!" And, as she turned away without any pretence of capping his pleasantry, he added, with a gleam of friendly malice: "I suppose you're going to the Hunt ball as Cassandra?"

Amherst, that morning, had sought out his wife with the definite resolve to efface the unhappy impression of their previous talk. He blamed himself for having been too easily repelled by her impatience. As the stronger of the two, with the power of a fixed purpose to sustain him, he should have allowed for the instability of her

impulses, and above all for the automatic influences of habit.

Knowing that she did not keep early hours he delayed till ten o'clock to present himself at her sitting-room door, but the maid who answered his knock informed him that Mrs. Amherst was not yet up.

His reply that he would wait did not appear to hasten the leisurely process of her toilet, and he had the room to himself for a full half-hour. Many months had passed since he had spent so long a time in it, and though habitually unobservant of external details, he now found an outlet for his restlessness in mechanically noting the intimate appurtenances of Bessy's life. He was at first merely conscious of a soothing harmony of line and colour, extending from the blurred tints of the rug to the subdued gleam of light on old picture-frames and on the slender flanks of porcelain vases; but gradually he began to notice how every chair and screen and cushion, and even every trifling utensil on the inlaid writing-desk, had been chosen with reference to the whole composition, and to the minutest requirements of a fastidious leisure. A few months ago this studied setting, if he had thought of it at all, would have justified itself as expressing the pretty woman's natural affinity with pretty toys; but now it was the cost of it that struck him. He was beginning to learn from Bessy's bills that no commodity is taxed as high as beauty, and the beauty about him filled him with sudden repugnance, as the disguise of the evil influences that were separating his wife's life from his.

But with her entrance he dismissed the thought, and tried to meet her as if nothing stood in the way of their

full communion. Her hair, still wet from the bath, broke from its dryad-like knot in dusky rings and spirals threaded with gold, and from her loose flexible draperies, and her whole person as she moved, there came a scent of youth and morning freshness. Her beauty touched him, and made it easier for him to humble himself.

"I was stupid and disagreeable last night. I can never say what I want when I have to count the minutes, and I've come back now for a quiet talk," he began.

A shade of distrust passed over Bessy's face. "About business?" she asked, pausing a few feet away from him.

"Don't let us give it that name!" He went up to her and drew her two hands into his. "You used to call it our work—won't you go back to that way of looking at it?"

Her hands resisted his pressure. "I didn't know, then, that it was going to be the only thing you cared for——"

But for her own sake he would not let her go on. "Some day I shall make you see how much my caring for it means my caring for you. But meanwhile," he urged, "won't you overcome your aversion to the subject, and bear with it as my work, if you no longer care to think of it as yours?"

Bessy, freeing herself, sat down on the edge of the straight-backed chair near the desk, as though to mark the parenthetical nature of the interview.

"I know you think me stupid—but wives are not usually expected to go into all the details of their husband's business. I have told you to do whatever you

wish at Westmore, and I can't see why that is not enough."

Amherst looked at her in surprise. Something in her quick mechanical utterance suggested that not only the thought but the actual words she spoke had been inspired, and he fancied he heard in them an echo of Blanche Carbury's tones. Though Bessy's intimacy with Mrs. Carbury was of such recent date, fragments of unheeded smoking-room gossip now recurred to confirm the vague antipathy which Amherst had felt for her the previous evening.

"I know that, among your friends, wives are not expected to interest themselves in their husbands' work, and if the mills were mine I should try to conform to the custom, though I should always think it a pity that the questions that fill a man's thoughts should be ruled out of his talk with his wife; but as it is, I am only your representative at Westmore, and I don't see how we can help having the subject come up between us."

Bessy remained silent, not as if acquiescing in his plea, but as though her own small stock of arguments had temporarily failed her; and he went on, enlarging on his theme with a careful avoidance of technical terms, and with the constant effort to keep the human and personal side of the question before her.

She listened without comment, her eyes fixed on a little jewelled letter-opener which she had picked up from the writing-table, and which she continued to turn in her fingers while he spoke.

The full development of Amherst's plans at Westmore, besides resulting, as he had foreseen, in Truscomb's resignation, and in Halford Gaines's outspoken

resistance to the new policy, had necessitated a larger immediate outlay of capital than the first estimates demanded, and Amherst, in putting his case to Bessy, was prepared to have her meet it on the old ground of the disapproval of all her advisers. But when he had ended she merely said, without looking up from the toy in her hand: "I always expected that you would need a great deal more money than you thought."

The comment touched him at his most vulnerable point. "But you see why? You understand how the work has gone on growing—?"

His wife lifted her head to glance at him for a moment. "I am not sure that I understand," she said indifferently; "but if another loan is necessary, of course I will sign the note for it."

The words checked his reply by bringing up, before he was prepared to deal with it, the other and more embarrassing aspect of the question. He had hoped to reawaken in Bessy some feeling for the urgency of his task before having to take up the subject of its cost; but her cold anticipation of his demands as part of a disagreeable business to be despatched and put out of mind, doubled the difficulty of what he had left to say; and it occurred to him that she had perhaps foreseen and reckoned on this result.

He met her eyes gravely. "Another loan is necessary; but if any proper provision is to be made for paying it back, your expenses will have to be cut down a good deal for the next few months."

The blood leapt to Bessy's face. "My expenses?

You seem to forget how much I've had to cut them down already."

"The household bills certainly don't show it. They are increasing steadily, and there have been some very heavy incidental payments lately."

"What do you mean by incidental payments?"

"Well, there was the pair of cobs you bought last month——"

She returned to a resigned contemplation of the letter-opener. "With only one motor, one must have more horses, of course."

"The stables seemed to me fairly full before. But if you required more horses, I don't see why, at this particular moment, it was also necessary to buy a set of Chinese vases for twenty-five hundred dollars."

Bessy, at this, lifted her head with an air of decision that surprised him. Her blush had faded as quickly as it came, and he noticed that she was pale to the lips.

"I know you don't care about such things; but I had an exceptional chance of securing the vases at a low price—they are really worth twice as much—and Dick always wanted a set of Ming for the drawing-room mantelpiece."

Richard Westmore's name was always tacitly avoided between them, for in Amherst's case the disagreeable sense of dependence on a dead man's bounty increased that feeling of obscure constraint and repugnance which any reminder of the first husband's existence is wont to produce in his successor.

He reddened at the reply, and Bessy, profiting by an embarrassment which she had perhaps consciously provoked, went on hastily, and as if by rote: "I have

left you perfectly free to do as you think best at the mills, but this perpetual discussion of my personal expenses is very unpleasant to me, as I am sure it must be to you, and in future I think it would be much better for us to have separate accounts."

"Separate accounts?" Amherst echoed in genuine astonishment.

"I should like my personal expenses to be under my own control again—I have never been used to accounting for every penny I spend."

The vertical lines deepened between Amherst's brows. "You are of course free to spend your money as you like—and I thought you were doing so when you authorised me, last spring, to begin the changes at Westmore."

Her lip trembled. "Do you reproach me for that? I didn't understand . . . you took advantage . . ."

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

At his tone the blood rushed back to her face. "It was my fault, of course— I only wanted to please you——"

Amherst was silent, confronted by the sudden sense of his own responsibility. What she said was true—he had known, when he exacted the sacrifice, that she made it only to please him, on an impulse of reawakened feeling, and not from any real recognition of a larger duty. The perception of this made him answer gently: "I am willing to take any blame you think I deserve; but it won't help us now to go back to the past. It is more important that we should come to an understanding about the future. If by keeping your personal account

separate, you mean that you wish to resume control of your whole income, then you ought to understand that the improvements at the mills will have to be dropped at once, and things there go back to their old state."

She started up with an impatient gesture. "Oh, I should like never to hear of the mills again!"

He looked at her a moment in silence. "Am I to take that as your answer?"

She walked toward her door without returning his look. "Of course," she murmured, "you will end by doing as you please."

The retort moved him, for he heard in it the cry of her wounded pride. He longed to be able to cry out in return that Westmore was nothing to him, that all he asked was to see her happy . . . But it was not true, and his manhood revolted from the deception. Besides, its effect would be only temporary—would wear no better than her vain efforts to simulate an interest in his work. Between them, forever, were the insurmountable barriers of character, of education, of habit—and yet it was not in him to believe that any barrier was insurmountable.

"Bessy," he exclaimed, following her, "don't let us part in this way——"

She paused with her hand on her dressing-room door. "It is time to dress for church," she objected, turning to glance at the little gilt clock on the chimney-piece.

"For church?" Amherst stared, wondering that at such a crisis she should have remained detached enough to take note of the hour.

"You forget," she replied, with an air of gentle re-

proof, "that before we married I was in the habit of going to church every Sunday."

"Yes—to be sure. Would you not like me to go with you?" he rejoined gently, as if roused to the consciousness of another omission in the long list of his social shortcomings; for church-going, at Lynbrook, had always struck him as a purely social observance.

But Bessy had opened the door of her dressing-room. "I much prefer that you should do what you like," she said as she passed from the room.

Amherst made no further attempt to detain her, and the door closed on her as though it were closing on a chapter in their lives.

"That's the end of it!" he murmured, picking up the letter-opener she had been playing with, and twirling it absently in his fingers. But nothing in life ever ends, and the next moment a new question confronted him—how was the next chapter to open?

BOOK III.

XIX.

It was late in October when Amherst returned to Lynbrook.

He had begun to learn, in the interval, the lesson most difficult to his direct and trenchant nature: that compromise is the law of married life. On the afternoon of his talk with his wife he had sought her out, determined to make a final effort to clear up the situation between them; but he learned that, immediately after luncheon, she had gone off in the motor with Mrs. Carbury and two men of the party, leaving word that they would probably not be back till evening. It cost Amherst a struggle, when he had humbled himself to receive this information from the butler, not to pack his portmanteau and take the first train for Hanaford; but he was still under the influence of Justine Brent's words, and also of his own feeling that, at this juncture, a break between himself and Bessy would be final.

He stayed on accordingly, enduring as best he might the mute observation of the household, and the gentle irony of Mr. Langhope's attentions; and before he left Lynbrook, two days later, a provisional understanding *had been reached.*

His wife proved more firm than he had foreseen in her resolve to regain control of her income, and the talk between them ended in reciprocal concessions, Bessy consenting to let the town house for the winter and remain at Lynbrook, while Amherst agreed to restrict his improvements at Westmore to such alterations as had already been begun, and to reduce the expenditure on these as much as possible. It was virtually the defeat of his policy, and he had to suffer the decent triumph of the Gaineses, as well as the bitterer pang of his foiled aspirations. In spite of the opposition of the directors, he had taken advantage of Truscomb's resignation to put Duplain at the head of the mills; but the new manager's outspoken disgust at the company's change of plan made it clear that he would not remain long at Westmore, and it was one of the miseries of Amherst's situation that he could not give the reasons for his defection, but must bear to figure in Duplain's terse vocabulary as a "quitter." The difficulty of finding a new manager expert enough to satisfy the directors, yet in sympathy with his own social theories, made Amherst fear that Duplain's withdrawal would open the way for Truscomb's reinstatement, an outcome on which he suspected Halford Gaines had always counted; and this possibility loomed before him as the final defeat of his hopes.

Meanwhile the issues ahead had at least the merit of keeping him busy. The task of modifying and retrenching his plans contrasted drearily with the hopeful activity of the past months, but he had an iron capacity for hard work under adverse conditions, and the fact of being too busy for thought helped him to wear through

the days. This pressure of work relieved him, at first, from too close consideration of his relation to Bessy. He had yielded up his dearest hopes at her wish, and for the moment his renunciation had set a chasm between them; but gradually he saw that, as he was patching together the ruins of his Westmore plans, so he must presently apply himself to the reconstruction of his married life.

Before leaving Lynbrook he had had a last word with Miss Brent; not a word of confidence—for the same sense of reserve kept both from any explicit renewal of their moment's intimacy—but one of those exchanges of commonplace phrase that circumstances may be left to charge with special meaning. Justine had merely asked if he were really leaving and, on his assenting, had exclaimed quickly: "But you will come back soon?"

"I shall certainly come back," he answered; and after a pause he added: "I shall find you here? You will remain at Lynbrook?"

On her part also there was a shade of hesitation; then she said with a smile: "Yes, I shall stay."

His look brightened. "And you'll write me if anything—if Bessy should not be well?"

"I will write you," she promised; and a few weeks after his return to Hanaford he had, in fact, received a short note from her. Its ostensible purpose was to reassure him as to Bessy's health, which had certainly grown stronger since Dr. Wyant had persuaded her, at the close of the last house-party, to accord herself a period of quiet; but (the writer added) now that Mr. Langhope and Mrs. Ansell had also left, the quiet was

perhaps too complete, and Bessy's nerves were beginning to suffer from the reaction.

Amherst had no difficulty in interpreting this brief communication. "I have succeeded in dispersing the people who are always keeping you and your wife apart; now is your chance: come and take it." That was what Miss Brent's letter meant; and his answer was a telegram to Bessy, announcing his return to Long Island.

The step was not an easy one; but decisive action, however hard, was always easier to Amherst than the ensuing interval of readjustment. To come to Lynbrook had required a strong effort of will; but the effort of remaining there called into play less disciplined faculties.

Amherst had always been used to doing things; now he had to resign himself to enduring a state of things. The material facilities of the life about him, the way in which the machinery of the great empty house ran on like some complex apparatus working in the void, increased the exasperation of his nerves. Dr. Wyant's suggestion—which Amherst suspected Justine of having prompted—that Mrs. Amherst should cancel her autumn engagements, and give herself up to a quiet out-door life with her husband, seemed to present the very opportunity these two distracted spirits needed to find and repossess each other. But, though Amherst was grateful to Bessy for having dismissed her visitors—partly to please him, as he guessed—yet he found the routine of the establishment more oppressive than when the house was full. If he could have been alone with her in a quiet corner—the despised cottage at West-

more, even!—he fancied they might still have been brought together by restricted space and the familiar exigencies of life. All the primitive necessities which bind together, through their recurring daily wants, natures fated to find no higher point of union, had been carefully eliminated from the life at Lynbrook, where material needs were not only provided for but anticipated by a hidden mechanism that filled the house with the perpetual sense of invisible attendance. Though Amherst knew that he and Bessy could never meet in the region of great issues, he thought he might have regained the way to her heart, and found relief from his own inaction, in the small ministrations of daily life; but the next moment he smiled to picture Bessy in surroundings where the clocks were not wound of themselves and the doors did not fly open at her approach. Those thick-crowding cares and drudgeries which serve as merciful screens between so many discordant natures would have been as intolerable to her as was to Amherst the great glare of leisure in which he and she were now confronted.

He saw that Bessy was in the state of propitiatory eagerness which always followed on her gaining a point in their long duel; and he could guess that she was tremulously anxious not only to make up to him, by all the arts she knew, for the sacrifice she had exacted, but also to conceal from everyone the fact that, as Mr. Langhope bluntly put it, he had been "brought to terms." Amherst was touched by her efforts, and half-ashamed of his own inability to respond to them. But his mind, released from its normal preoccupations, *had become a dangerous instrument of analysis and*

disintegration, and conditions which, a few months before, he might have accepted with the wholesome tolerance of the busy man, now pressed on him unendurably. He saw that he and his wife were really face to face for the first time since their marriage. Hitherto something had always intervened between them—first the spell of her grace and beauty, and the brief joy of her participation in his work; then the sorrow of their child's death, and after that the temporary exhilaration of carrying out his ideas at Westmore—but now that the last of these veils had been torn away they faced each other as strangers.

The habit of keeping factory hours always drove Amherst forth long before his wife's day began, and in the course of one of his early tramps he met Miss Brent and Cicely setting out for a distant swamp where rumour had it that a rare native orchid might be found. Justine's sylvan tastes had developed in the little girl a passion for such pillaging expeditions, and Cicely, who had discovered that her stepfather knew almost as much about birds and squirrels as Miss Brent did about flowers, was not to be appeased till Amherst had scrambled into the pony-cart, wedging his long legs between a fern-box and a lunch-basket, and balancing a Scotch terrier's telescopic body across his knees.

The season was so mild that only one or two light windless frosts had singed the foliage of oaks and beeches, and gilded the roadsides with a smooth carpeting of maple leaves. The morning haze rose like smoke from burnt-out pyres of sumach and suga-

maple; a silver bloom lay on the furrows of the ploughed fields; and now and then, as they drove on, the wooded road showed at its end a tarnished disk of light, where sea and sky were merged.

At length they left the road for a winding track through scrub-oaks and glossy thickets of mountain-laurel; the track died out at the foot of a wooded knoll, and clambering along its base they came upon the swamp. There it lay in charmed solitude, shut in by a tawny growth of larch and swamp-maple, its edges burnt out to smouldering shades of russet, ember-red and ashen-grey, while the quaking centre still preserved a jewel-like green, where hidden lanes of moisture wound between islets tufted with swamp-cranberry and with the charred browns of fern and wild rose and bay. Sodden earth and decaying branches gave forth a strange sweet odour, as of the aromatic essences embalming a dead summer; and the air charged with this scent was so still that the snapping of witch-hazel pods, the drop of a nut, the leap of a startled frog, pricked the silence with separate points of sound.

The pony made fast, the terrier released, and fern-box and lunch-basket slung over Amherst's shoulder, the three explorers set forth on their journey. Amherst, as became his sex, went first; but after a few absent-minded plunges into the sedgy depths between the islets, he was ordered to relinquish his command and fall to the rear, where he might perform the humbler service of occasionally lifting Cicely over unspannable gulfs of moisture.

Justine, leading the way, guided them across the

treacherous surface as fearlessly as a king-fisher, lighting instinctively on every grass-tussock and submerged tree-stump of the uncertain path. Now and then she paused, her feet drawn close on their narrow perch, and her slender body swaying over as she reached down for some rare growth detected among the withered reeds and grasses; then she would right herself again by a backward movement as natural as the upward spring of a branch—so free and flexible in all her motions that she seemed akin to the swaying reeds and curving brambles which caught at her as she passed.

At length the explorers reached the mossy corner where the orchids grew, and Cicely, securely balanced on a fallen tree-trunk, was allowed to dig the coveted roots. When they had been packed away, it was felt that this culminating moment must be celebrated with immediate libations of jam and milk; and having climbed to a dry slope among the pepper-bushes, the party fell on the contents of the lunch-basket. It was just the hour when Bessy's maid was carrying her breakfast-tray, with its delicate service of old silver and porcelain, into the darkened bedroom at Lynbrook; but early rising and hard scrambling had whetted the appetites of the naturalists, and the nursery fare which Cicely spread before them seemed a sumptuous reward for their toil.

"I do like this kind of picnic much better than the ones where mother takes all the footmen, and the mayonnaise has to be scraped off things before I can eat them," Cicely declared, lifting her foaming mouth from a beaker of milk.

Amherst, lighting his pipe, stretched himself con-

tentedly among the pepper-bushes, steeped in that unreflecting peace which is shed into some hearts by communion with trees and sky. He too was glad to get away from the footmen and the mayonnaise, and he imagined that his stepdaughter's exclamation summed up all the reasons for his happiness. The boyish wood-craft which he had cultivated in order to encourage the same taste in his factory lads came to life in this sudden return to nature, and he redeemed his clumsiness in crossing the swamp by spying a marsh-wren's nest that had escaped Justine, and detecting in a swiftly-flitting olive-brown bird a belated tanager in autumn incognito.

Cicely sat rapt while he pictured the bird's winter pilgrimage, with glimpses of the seas and islands that fled beneath him till his long southern flight ended in the dim glades of the equatorial forests.

"Oh, what a good life—how I should like to be a wander-bird, and look down people's chimneys twice a year!" Justine laughed, tilting her head back to catch a last glimpse of the tanager.

The sun beamed full on their ledge from a sky of misty blue, and she had thrown aside her hat, uncovering her thick waves of hair, blue-black in the hollows, with warm rusty edges where they took the light. Cicely dragged down a plummy spray of traveller's joy and wound it above her friend's forehead; and thus wreathed, with her bright pallor relieved against the dusky autumn tints, Justine looked like a wood-spirit who had absorbed into herself the last golden juices of the year.

She leaned back laughing against a tree-trunk, pelt-

ing Cicely with witch-hazel pods, making the terrier waltz for scraps of ginger-bread, and breaking off now and then to imitate, with her clear full notes, the call of some hidden marsh-bird, or the scolding chatter of a squirrel in the scrub-oaks.

"Is that what you'd like most about the journey—looking down the chimneys?" Amherst asked with a smile.

"Oh, I don't know—I should love it all! Think of the joy of skimming over half the earth—seeing it born again out of darkness every morning! Sometimes, when I've been up all night with a patient, and have seen the world *come back to me* like that, I've been almost mad with its beauty; and then the thought that I've never seen more than a little corner of it makes me feel as if I were chained. But I think if I had wings I should choose to be a house-swallow; and then, after I'd had my fill of wonders, I should come back to my familiar corner, and my house full of busy humdrum people, and fly low to warn them of rain, and wheel up high to show them it was good haying weather, and know what was going on in every room in the house, and every house in the village; and all the while I should be hugging my wonderful big secret—the secret of snow-plains and burning deserts, and coral islands and buried cities—and should put it all into my chatter under the eaves, that the people in the house were always too busy to stop and listen to—and when winter came I'm sure I should hate to leave them, even to go back to my great Brazilian forests full of orchids and monkeys!"

"But, Justine, in winter you could take care of the monkeys," the practical Cicely suggested.

"Yes—and that would remind me of home!" Justine cried, swinging about to pinch the little girl's chin.

She was in one of the buoyant moods when the spirit of life caught her in its grip, and shook and tossed her on its mighty waves as a sea-bird is tossed through the spray of flying rollers. At such moments all the light and music of the world seemed distilled into her veins, and forced up in bubbles of laughter to her lips and eyes. Amherst had never seen her thus, and he watched her with the sense of relaxation which the contact of limpid gaiety brings to a mind obscured by failure and self-distrust. The world was not so dark a place after all, if such springs of merriment could well up in a heart as sensitive as hers to the burden and toil of existence.

"Isn't it strange," she went on with a sudden drop to gravity, "that the bird whose wings carry him farthest and show him the most wonderful things, is the one who always comes back to the eaves, and is happiest in the thick of everyday life?"

Her eyes met Amherst's. "It seems to me," he said, "that you're like that yourself—loving long flights, yet happiest in the thick of life."

She raised her dark brows laughingly. "So I imagine—but then you see I've never had the long flight!"

Amherst smiled. "Ah, there it is—one never knows—one never says, *This is the moment!* because, however good it is, it always seems the door to a better one beyond. Faust never said it till the end, when he'd

nothing left of all he began by thinking worth while; and then, with what a difference it was said!"

She pondered. "Yes—but it *was* the best, after all—the moment in which he had nothing left. . . ."

"Oh," Cicely broke in suddenly, "do look at the squirrel up there! See, father—he's off! Let's follow him!"

As she crouched there, with head thrown back, and sparkling lips and eyes, her fair hair—of her mother's very hue—making a shining haze about her face, Amherst recalled the winter evening at Hopewood, when he and Bessy had tracked the grey squirrel under the snowy beeches. Scarcely three years ago—and how bitter memory had turned! A chilly cloud spread over his spirit, reducing everything once more to the leaden hue of reality. . . .

"It's too late for any more adventures—we must be going," he said.

XX.

AMHERST'S morning excursions with his stepdaughter and Miss Brent renewed themselves more than once. He welcomed any pretext for escaping from the unprofitable round of his thoughts, and these woodland explorations, with their gay rivalry of search for some rare plant or elusive bird, and the contact with the child's happy wonder, and with the morning brightness of Justine's mood, gave him his only moments of self-forgetfulness.

But the first time that Cicely's chatter carried home an echo of their adventures, Amherst saw a cloud on his wife's face. Her resentment of Justine's influence over the child had long since subsided, and in the temporary absence of the governess she was glad to have Cicely amused; but she was never quite satisfied that those about her should have pursuits and diversions in which she did not share. Her jealousy did not concentrate itself on her husband and Miss Brent: Amherst had never shown any inclination for the society of other women, and if the possibility had been suggested to her, she would probably have said that Justine was not "in his style"—so unconscious is a pretty woman apt to be of the versatility of masculine tastes. But Amherst saw that she felt herself excluded from amusements in which she had no desire to join, and of which

she consequently failed to see the purpose; and he gave up accompanying his stepdaughter.

Bessy, as if in acknowledgment of his renunciation, rose earlier in order to prolong their rides together. Dr. Wyant had counselled her against the fatigue of following the hounds, and she instinctively turned their horses away from the course the hunt was likely to take; but now and then the cry of the pack, or the flash of red on a distant slope, sent the blood to her face and made her press her mare to a gallop. When they escaped such encounters she showed no great zest in the exercise, and their rides resolved themselves into a spiritless middle-aged jog along the autumn lanes. In the early days of their marriage the joy of a canter side by side had merged them in a community of sensation beyond need of speech; but now that the physical spell had passed they felt the burden of a silence that neither knew how to break.

Once only, a moment's friction galvanised these lifeless rides. It was one morning when Bessy's wild mare Impulse, under-exercised and overfed, suddenly broke from her control, and would have unseated her but for Amherst's grasp on the bridle.

"The horse is not fit for you to ride," he exclaimed, as the hot creature, with shudders of defiance rippling her flanks, lapsed into sullen subjection.

"It's only because I don't ride her enough," Bessy panted. "That new groom is ruining her mouth."

"You must not ride her alone, then."

"I shall not let that man ride her."

"I say you must not ride her alone."

"It's ridiculous to have a groom at one's heels!"

"Nevertheless you must, if you ride Impulse."

Their eyes met, and she quivered and yielded like the horse. "Oh, if you say so—" She always hugged his brief flashes of authority.

"I do say so. You promise me?"

"If you like——"

Amherst had made an attempt to occupy himself with the condition of Lynbrook, one of those slovenly villages, without individual character or the tradition of self-respect, which spring up in America on the skirts of the rich summer colonies. But Bessy had never given Lynbrook a thought, and he realised the futility of hoping to interest her in its mongrel population of day-labourers and publicans so soon after his glaring failure at Westmore. The sight of the village irritated him whenever he passed through the Lynbrook gates, but having perforce accepted the situation of prince consort, without voice in the government, he tried to put himself out of relation with all the questions which had hitherto engrossed him, and to see life simply as a spectator. He could even conceive that, under certain conditions, there might be compensations in the passive attitude; but unfortunately these conditions were not such as the life at Lynbrook presented.

The temporary cessation of Bessy's week-end parties had naturally not closed her doors to occasional visitors, and glimpses of the autumnal animation of Long Island passed now and then across the Amhersts' horizon. Blanche Carbury had installed herself at Mapleside, a fashionable colony half-way between Lynbrook and Clifton, and even Amherst, unused as he was to noting

the seemingly inconsecutive movements of idle people, could not but remark that her visits to his wife almost invariably coincided with Ned Bowfort's cantering over unannounced from the Hunt Club, where he had taken up his autumn quarters.

There was something very likeable about Bowfort, to whom Amherst was attracted by the fact that he was one of the few men of Bessy's circle who knew what was going on in the outer world. Throughout an existence which one divined to have been both dependent and desultory, he had preserved a sense of wider relations and acquired a smattering of information to which he applied his only independent faculty, that of clear thought. He could talk intelligently and not too inaccurately of the larger questions which Lynbrook ignored, and a gay indifference to the importance of money seemed the crowning grace of his nature, till Amherst suddenly learned that this attitude of detachment was generally ascribed to the liberality of Mrs. Fenton Carbury. "Everybody knows she married Fenton to provide for Ned," someone let fall in the course of one of the smoking-room dissertations on which the host of Lynbrook had such difficulty in fixing his attention; and the speaker's matter-of-course tone, and the careless acquiescence of his hearers, were more offensive to Amherst than the fact itself. In the first flush of his disgust he classed the story as one of the lies bred in the malarious air of after-dinner gossip; but gradually he saw that, whether true or not, it had sufficient circulation to cast a shade of ambiguity on the persons concerned. Bessy alone seemed deaf to the rumours about her friend. There was something captivating

to her in Mrs. Carbury's slang and noise, in her defiance of decorum and contempt of criticism. "I like Blanche because she doesn't pretend," was Bessy's vague justification of the lady; but in reality she was under the mysterious spell which such natures cast over the less venturesome imaginations of their own sex.

Amherst at first tried to deaden himself to the situation, as part of the larger coil of miseries in which he found himself; but all his traditions were against such tolerance, and they were roused to revolt by the receipt of a newspaper clipping, sent by an anonymous hand, enlarging on the fact that the clandestine meetings of a fashionable couple were being facilitated by the connivance of a Long Island *châtelaine*. Amherst, hot from the perusal of this paragraph, sprang into the first train, and laid the clipping before his father-in-law, who chanced to be passing through town on his way from the Hudson to the Hot Springs.

Mr. Langhope, ensconced in the cushioned privacy of the reading-room at the Amsterdam Club, where he had invited his son-in-law to meet him, perused the article with the cool eye of the collector to whom a new curiosity is offered.

"I suppose," he mused, "that in the time of the Pharaohs the Morning Papyrus used to serve up this kind of thing"—and then, as the nervous tension of his hearer expressed itself in an abrupt movement, he added, handing back the clipping with a smile: "What do you propose to do? Kill the editor, and forbid Blanche and Bowfort the house?"

"I mean to do something," Amherst began, suddenly

chilled by the realisation that his wrath had not yet shaped itself into a definite plan of action.

"Well, it must be that or nothing," said Mr. Langhope, drawing his stick meditatively across his knee. "And, of course, if it's *that*, you'll land Bessy in a devil of a mess."

Without giving his son-in-law time to protest, he touched rapidly but vividly on the inutility and embarrassment of libel suits, and on the devices whereby the legal means of vindication from such attacks may be turned against those who have recourse to them; and Amherst listened with a sickened sense of the incompatibility between abstract standards of honour and their practical application.

"What should you do, then?" he murmured, as Mr. Langhope ended with his light shrug and a "See Tredegar, if you don't believe me"—; and his father-in-law replied with an evasive gesture: "Why, leave the responsibility where it belongs!"

"Where it belongs?"

"To Fenton Carbury, of course. Luckily it's nobody's business but his, and if he doesn't mind what is said about his wife I don't see how you can take up the cudgels for her without casting another shade on her somewhat chequered reputation."

Amherst stared. "His wife? What do I care what's said of her? I'm thinking of mine!"

"Well, if Carbury has no objection to his wife's meeting Bowfort, I don't see how you can object to her meeting him at your house. In such matters, as you know, it has mercifully been decided that the husband's attitude shall determine other people's; other-

wise we should be deprived of the legitimate pleasure of slandering our neighbours." Mr. Langhope was always careful to temper his explanations with an "as you know:" he would have thought it ill-bred to omit this parenthesis in elucidating the social code to his son-in-law.

"Then you mean that I can do nothing?" Amherst exclaimed.

Mr. Langhope smiled. "What applies to Carbury applies to you—by doing nothing you establish the fact that there's nothing to do; just as you create the difficulty by recognising it." And he added, as Amherst sat silent: "Take Bessy away, and they'll have to see each other elsewhere."

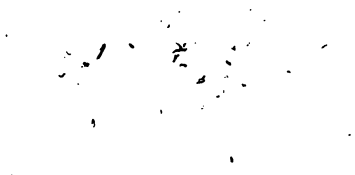
Amherst returned to Lynbrook with the echoes of this casuistry in his brain. It seemed to him but a part of the ingenious system of evasion whereby a society bent on the undisturbed pursuit of amusement had contrived to protect itself from the intrusion of the disagreeable: a policy summed up in Mr. Langhope's concluding advice that Amherst should take his wife away. Yes—that was wealth's contemptuous answer to every challenge of responsibility: duty, sorrow and disgrace were equally to be evaded by a change of residence, and nothing in life need be faced and fought out while one could pay for a passage to Europe!

In a calmer mood Amherst's sense of humour would have preserved him from such a view of his father-in-law's advice; but just then it fell like a spark on his smouldering prejudices. He was clear-sighted enough to recognise the obstacles to legal retaliation; but this

only made him the more resolved to assert his will in his own house. He no longer paused to consider the possible effect of such a course on his already strained relations with his wife: the man's will rose in him and spoke.

The scene between Bessy and himself was short and sharp; and it ended in a way that left him more than ever perplexed at the ways of her sex. Impatient of preamble, he had opened the attack with his ultimatum: the suspected couple were to be denied the house. Bessy flamed into immediate defence of her friend; but to Amherst's surprise she no longer sounded the note of her own rights. Husband and wife were animated by emotions deeper-seated and more instinctive than had ever before confronted them; yet while Amherst's resistance was gathering strength from the conflict, Bessy unexpectedly collapsed in tears and submission. She would do as he wished, of course—give up seeing Blanche, dismiss Bowfort, wash her hands, in short, of the imprudent pair—in such matters a woman needed a man's guidance, a wife must of necessity see with her husband's eyes; and she looked up into his through a mist of penitence and admiration. . .

END OF VOL. I.



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